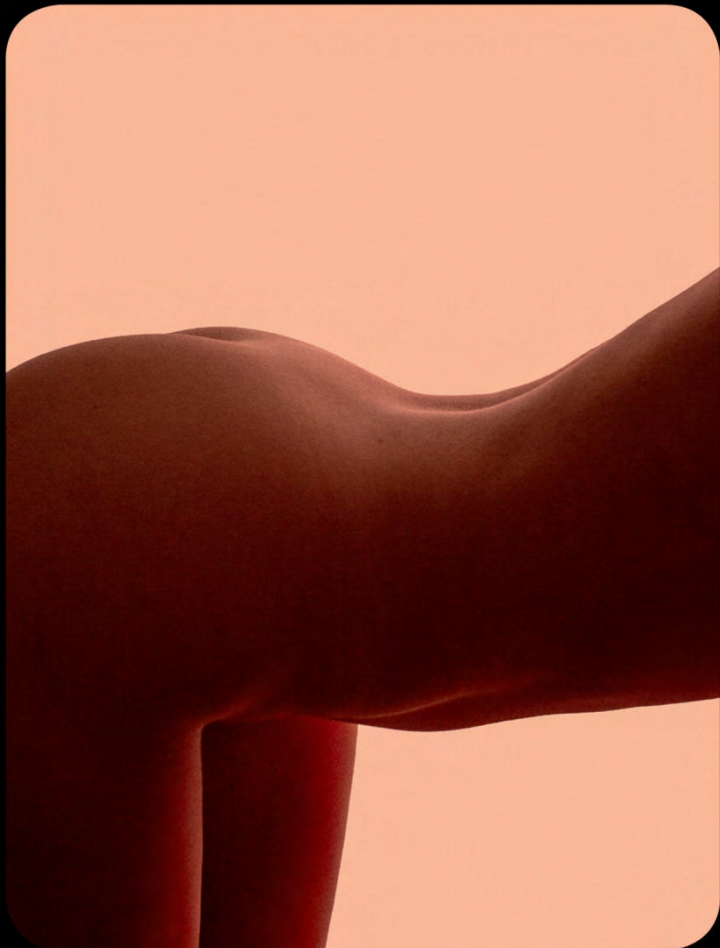
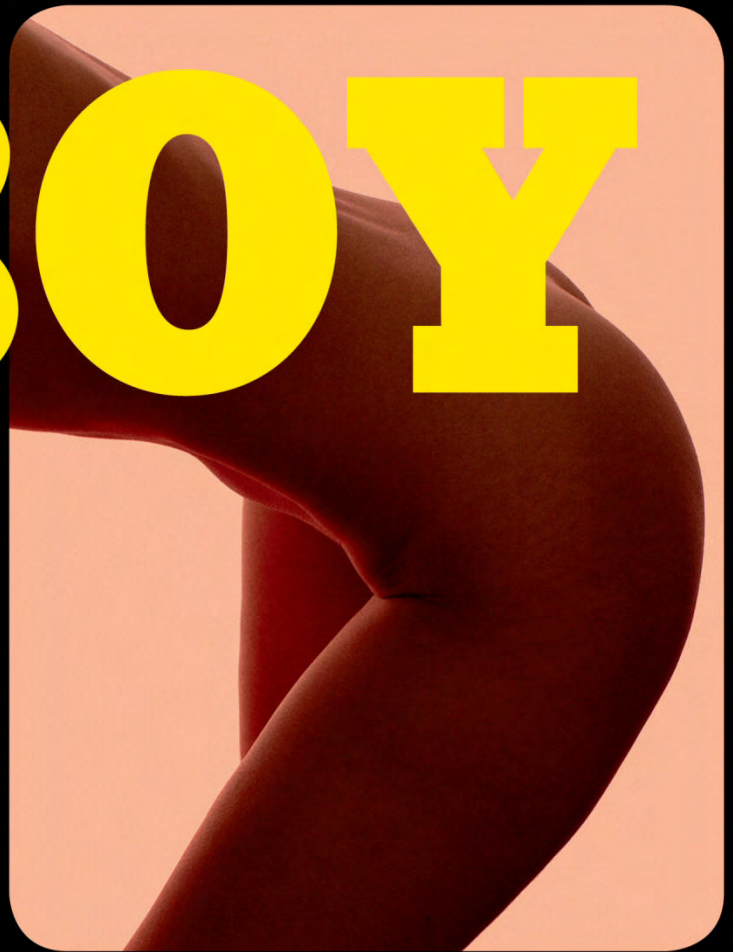
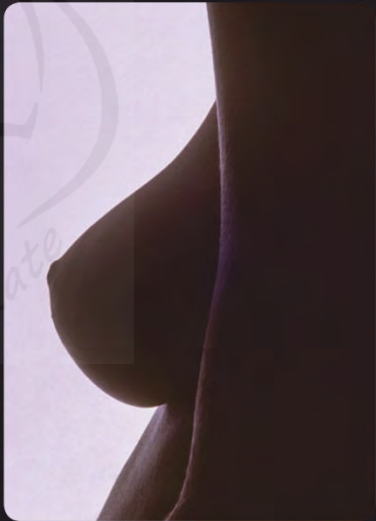


PLAYBOY









ASHLEY C. FORD

t: @ismashfizzle

A writer well acquainted with society's construction of body image, Ford met with I Weigh founder Jameela Jamil for this issue's *Playboy Interview*. "Jameela has certainly amplified the conversation about who gets to influence what we view as 'beautiful' or 'normal' bodies and how they directly benefit from the insecurities they encourage," says the Brooklyn-based writer. Named one of *Forbes* magazine's 30 Under 30 in Media in 2017, she's currently working on a memoir, *Somebody's Daughter*.



ALICIA GARZA

t: @aliciagarza

"Democracy is not a spectator sport. I hope the *Symposium* motivates readers to get involved," says the #BlackLivesMatter co-founder and guest editor of the latest *Playboy Symposium*. The seasoned community organizer recently founded Black Futures Lab and co-founded Supermajority to empower black communities and women in politics respectively. She also serves as the strategy and partnerships director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance and is a frequent contributor to *Marie Claire*.

NADINE STROSSEN

e: nadine.strossen@nyls.edu

In *Words Matter*, the New York Law School professor emerita and former ACLU president emphasizes the correlation between speech and progress. Strossen, who penned the 2018 book *Hate: Why We Should Resist It With Free Speech, Not Censorship*, argues, "The only effective way to encourage political correctness is through *more* speech. Civil discourse requires respectfully listening to ideas, as well as respectfully responding."



SASHA SAMSONOVA

i: @sashasamsonova

The Ukrainian photographer, known for her portrait work, has lent *PLAYBOY* her talents several times in the past year, shooting porn star turned whistle-blower Stormy Daniels, as well as makeup mogul Kylie Jenner and her then beau, Travis Scott. For *The Empath*, Samsonova turned her lens on Alicia Loraina Olivas, our tenacious June Playmate. "Alicia's confidence and fearlessness just poured out of her," says Samsonova. "She stood in ice-cold water and was like, 'I feel great!' She radiated so much energy—nothing inspires me more."

GEORGE MCCALMAN

i: @mccalmanco

The vignettes bringing to life the voices in *The Playboy Symposium* are creations of this San Francisco-based artist. "The five figures are all fighters," says McCalman. "They believe humanity can be better than it is. I tried to capture that essence in my illustrations." His work can also be found in the *San Francisco Chronicle* columns *Observed* and *The Usual*, and in his debut collection, *Illustrated Black History*, out in August.



MATT LASLO

t: @mattlaslo

What makes Cory Gardner of Colorado a unique figure in national politics? *PLAYBOY* called on veteran Washington reporter Laslo to find out. In *Senator Gardner, Radical Centrist*, he discovers that despite sharing a ballot with Republicans, Gardner often holds positions that diverge from his party's. Of note: his support for cannabis legalization. "I was most surprised to learn Gardner—a champion of his state's legal cannabis industry—has never even tried weed," reports Laslo.

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LONNIE MILLSAP

i: @lonniemillsap

The Reuben Award-nominated cartoonist and *New Yorker* contributor has a significant professional relationship with our Speech Issue's theme. "As a cartoonist, freedom of speech is important because it gives you the ability to expand on any idea that comes to mind without having to answer to anybody," he says. Millsap's cartoons can be found in his annual art books, the latest of which is *My Nib Is Cold!*, and on page 61.



TINA HORN

t: @tinahornsass

For *SFSX: The Dirty Mind Guide 2 Talking Dirty*, Horn collaborated with illustrator Alejandra Gutiérrez to bring her comic series to life for *PLAYBOY*. "Alejandra helped me dial down the serious nature of my sci-fi comics and accentuate the playful fizziness, sight gags and absurd horniness instead." In addition to working in comics, Horn is a non-fiction writer, *Rolling Stone* reporter, podcast producer and host (*Why Are People Into That?!*) and sex-work educator.



KILEY REID

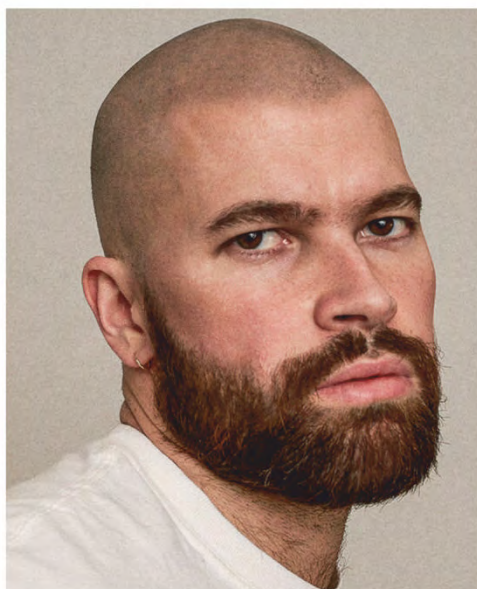
i: @kileyreid

"I was thrilled to make *PLAYBOY* a home for this short story, since it's one I've spent longer on than any other short piece," says the Iowa Writers' Workshop graduate and Truman Capote Fellow of her inaugural *PLAYBOY* fiction piece, *Your First Pet and the Street You Grew Up On*. In 2019 the Philadelphia-based writer released her debut novel, *Such a Fun Age*, landing herself a spot on the *New York Times* best-sellers list.

KRISTI BECK

i: @kristiib

Our senior manager of partner strategy is no stranger to *PLAYBOY* magazine: Beck has been helping select Playmates for more than a year. "I'm passionate about female self-image and have worked to increase inclusivity in the *Playboy* brand. It's exciting to help a meaningful franchise evolve." For this issue, Beck expanded her role, recruiting I Weigh's Jameela Jamil, a fellow champion of inclusivity, to serve as guest editor.



RICHIE TALBOY

i: @okrichie

"I was hoping to rewrite history while capturing the iconic hypermasculinity of men's fragrance campaigns from the 1980s and 1990s," says the photographer of his shoot for *The Future Is Dorian Electra*. "Dorian was perfect for that, because they have a natural campiness that's ideal for creating imagery." Talboy portrays all his subjects—his clients include the high-fashion brand Prada as well as such high-profile celebrities as Kim Kardashian—with a distinct air of eccentricity.

OSMAN CAN YEREBAKAN

i: @osmancanyerebakan

New York magazine and *Artforum* are just two of the publications Yerebakan contributes to in addition to *PLAYBOY*. For this issue, the writer traveled to Chicago to meet Nick Cave, subject of our artist feature *Body & Soul*. "Meeting Nick at Facility, where he lives and works, was a unique experience," says Yerebakan. "It gave me the opportunity to witness his everyday life. It's those intimate moments that illustrate Cave's prolific nature as a thinker, maker and human."



by Kristie Krause; pp. 28–33 styling by Kelley Ash; pp. 36–41 styling by Wilford Lenov, prop styling by Jordan Grossman & Ava Jones, hair by Randy Stodghill, makeup by Bethany Garita for Exclusive Artists using NARS; pp. 47–55 styling and makeup by Jameela Jamil, hair by Robert Lopez; pp. 72–83 styling by Jill Vincent, hair and makeup by Fareeza Ghani; pp. 88–93 styling by Wilford Lenov, hair by Bree Stanchfield, makeup by Ashley Gomila, movement direction by Ryan Walker Page, hand modeling by Jamie Donovan, Raymond Ejiofor, Reshma Gajjar, Kenzie McClure, Ty Wells; pp. 100–113 styling by Kelley Ash and India Madonna, hair and makeup by Eddie Cook, Sara Denman, Michaeline, Melissa Rogers, Bree Stanchfield, Francie Tomalonis, hair and makeup assistance by Annie Alonso, assistance to Chloe Chippendale by Yana Yatsuk, backdrop by Papers + Ink Studio; pp. 114–119 styling by Warren Alfie Baker, grooming by Peter De Oliveira, dogs from Wags & Walks, with special thanks to Lenny's Legacy, a foundation to support senior dogs started by Patrick Stewart and Sunny Ozell; pp. 126–137 styling by Kelley Ash, hair and makeup by Bree Stanchfield; pp. 142–149 styling by Chloe & Chenelle Delgadillo, set design by Kaitlyn Darby, hair by Tony Medina, makeup by Lilly Keys; pp. 158–165 styling by John Tan, grooming by Janice Kinjo; pp. 172–183 styling by Kelley Ash, hair and makeup by Bree Stanchfield.



RESPECT
YOUR
PARTNER(S).



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PLAYBOY INTERVIEW

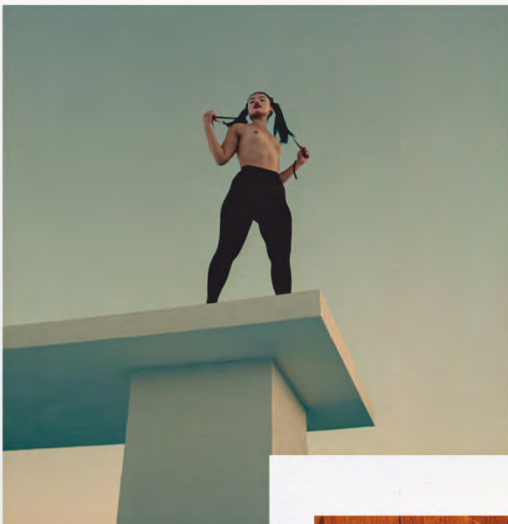
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THIS APRIL



iWEIGH

LISTEN
ON

STITCHER



A Letter

Dear Reader,

Last spring, in our first-ever issue devoted entirely to freedom of speech, we told you our most productive contribution to the conversation was not to speak louder but to listen better. It has certainly been a year of speech worth listening to, from Greta Thunberg's inspiring climate change advocacy to the stories of survivors of sexual assault to the poetry of a new generation of pop musicians such as Lizzo, Billie Eilish and Tyler, the Creator. Just a few months into this new decade, with election-year drama raging in the U.S. and social media offering an ever more powerful megaphone to one and all, it's clear we're in store for a wild and unpredictable Roaring Twenties.

Across the nearly 250 pages of this issue, we've put together a collection of speech-themed stories you're unlikely to find anywhere else, from a profile of a weed-positive Republican senator to a feature on the conundrum of fighting online hate speech to a step-by-step guide to talking dirty.

Jameela Jamil, the formidable actor, writer and founder of the community-activism platform I Weigh, served as editorial partner for this issue and is the subject of our long-form *Playboy Interview*. "I make my own lanes and I dip in and out of them as I please," she tells us. "It is my duty to speak up and speak out about things that are hurting me and others who have less privilege and protection." As we prepared to send this issue to the printer, the announcement of Jamil's role in an upcoming HBO series sparked a new bout of social media backlash against her, underscoring the urgency of grappling with the complex issues she cares so deeply about—from shaming to cancel culture to representation and the power of new voices.

That every voice has a right to be heard, whether we agree with that voice or not, is the provocative position taken in *Words Matter* by Nadine Strossen, who led the ACLU for nearly two decades. And as we careen toward November 3, we're reminded once again that your vote is your voice. For *The Playboy Symposium: On Voting & Democracy*, we asked civil rights

leader Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, to gather a group of grassroots activists to share their thoughts on the fight for social and political change.

A report from Tinseltown (*Silenced by Hollywood*) by journalist Amanda Fortini finds that, despite the efforts of the MeToo and Time's Up movements, the entertainment industry remains a treacherous place for women who demand parity with their male counterparts. "A lot of men are waiting for this 'episode' to go away," Rosanna Arquette tells us, "and there are many predators still in power."

Turning to the art world, writer Alison M. Gingeras profiles the prolific Betty Tompkins, who has made the fight against censorship a pillar of her career, creating unapologetically explicit paintings despite shortsighted critics and galleries too fainthearted to exhibit her work. Check out her stranger-than-fiction story in *Don't Fuck With Betty Tompkins*.

And because we wouldn't be PLAYBOY without a wealth of capital-P Pleasure, this issue also includes Patrick Stewart talking *Star Trek* while cavorting with rescue pit bulls (20Q), artist Nick Cave sharing previously unpublished work from his immersive oeuvre (*Body & Soul*) and pop provocateur Peaches discussing her newest project—starring a legion of singing sex toys (*A Fresh Bite of Peaches*).

Our cover is a mosaic of riotous and righteous self-expression featuring a host of Playmates past. Chloe Chippendale's mini-portraits introduce a macro concept: The more voices, the stronger the conversation. In that spirit, we offer another first in PLAYBOY history. Curious? Turn to our epic *Playmates of the Year* pictorial on page 100.

Speaking of Playmates, we'd like to introduce three women proudly and gorgeously taking on the mantle this spring: Marsha Elle, Savannah Smith and Alicia Loraina Olivas, photographed by Ana Dias, Graham Dunn and Sasha Samsonova, respectively. As Olivas eloquently puts it in her Playmate essay, "Each of our voices is important. We should spend more time listening and less time judging each other."

To that we say, "Hear, hear."

From the Editors

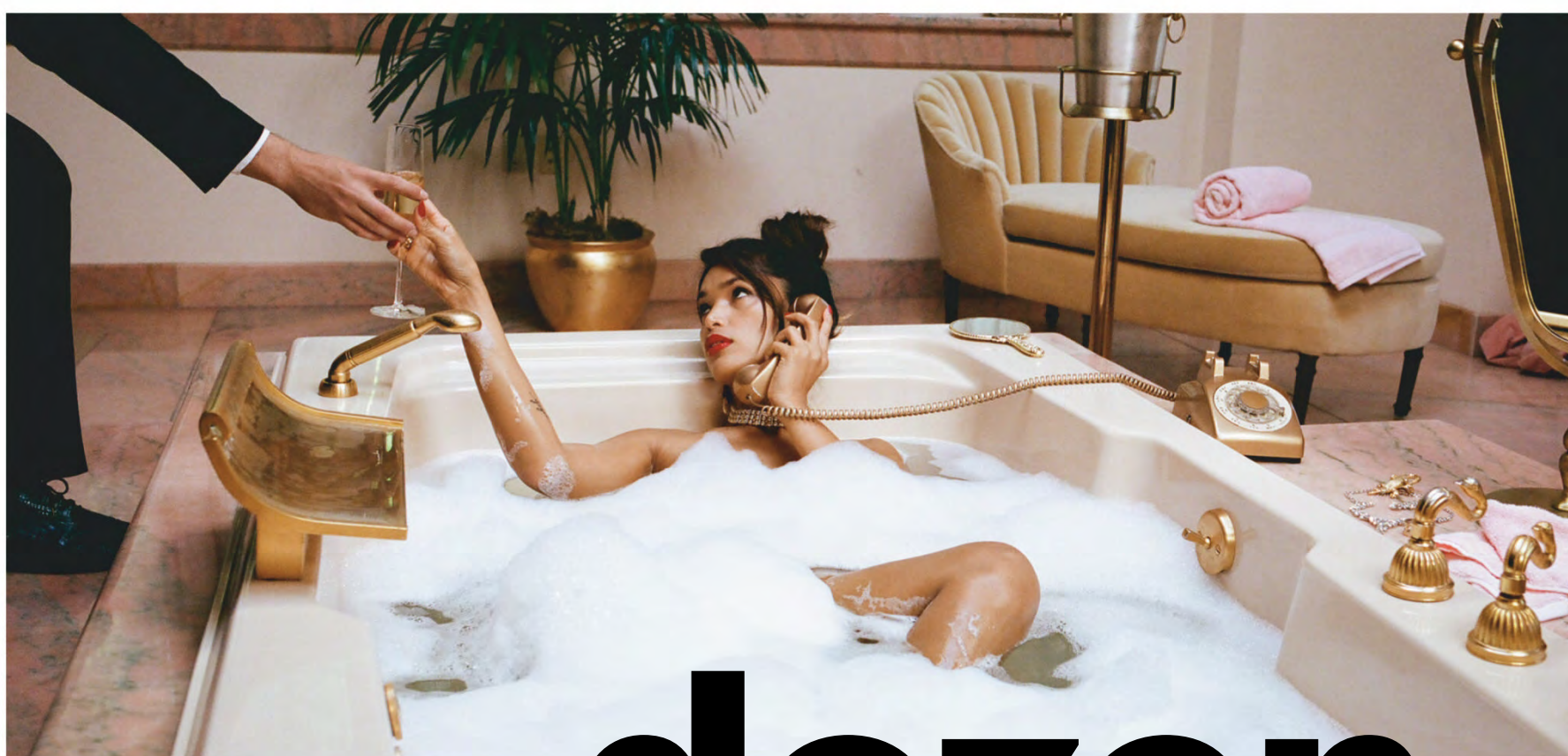
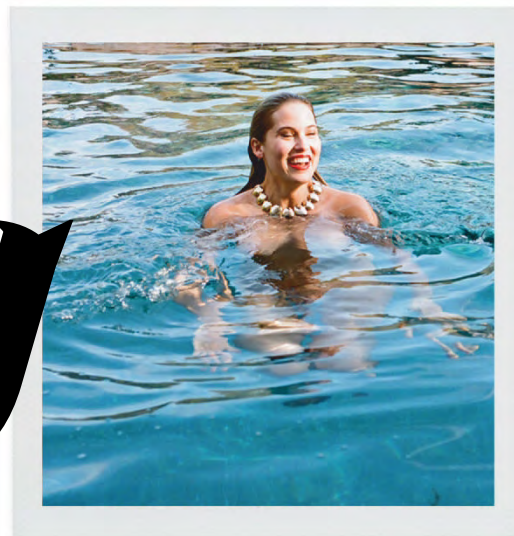


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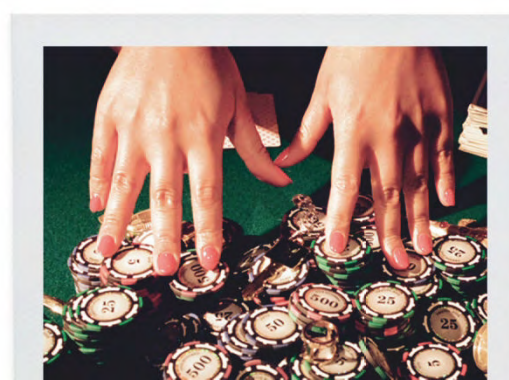
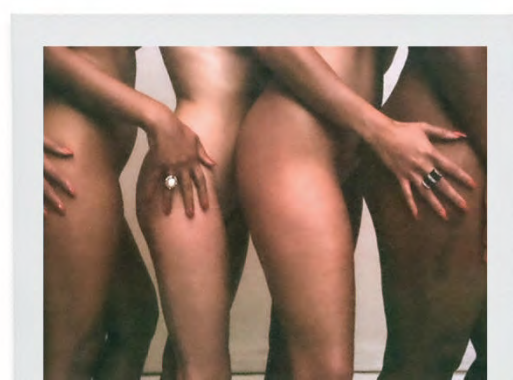
They say you shouldn't play favorites, so we didn't: This year all 12 of our 2019 Playmates of the Month will be honored as Playmates of the Year.

"Without evolution, nothing will ever succeed. It felt right to start the decade with a big change," says Kristi Beck, Playboy's senior manager of partner strategy who helped make the decision to honor all the women instead of just one. "I'm indebted to all of our powerhouse, unique 2019 Playmates, and I'm excited to see all 12 represented as our Playmates of the Year in 2020."

Honoring collaboration over competition, all our Playmates from last year—along with 2019 PMOY Jordan Emanuel, who helped celebrate the changing of the guard—converged on a Los Angeles mansion in January for a shoot of historic proportions. The set buzzed with energy as photographers Ali Mitton and Chloe Chippendale, in collaboration with stylist Kelley Ash, captured the 12 PMOYs together (outtakes presented on this page). See the results—a veritable sisterhood of sizzle—on page 100.



dozen





Boss Lady

When we heard Jameela Jamil (left), outspoken star of NBC's *The Good Place* and founder of the advocacy brand I Weigh, was interested in sitting for the *Playboy Interview*, we decided to take things a step further. Because Jamil's goal of a more inclusive world aligns with our own, we asked the entrepreneurial Brit to name some talent she felt deserved more attention. Topping the list was actress-comedian Quinta Brunson, author of this issue's defiant humor essay, *Average Acceptance Now*. No stranger to overachievement, Jamil was also pivotal in inviting April Playmate Marsha Elle into the Playboy family.

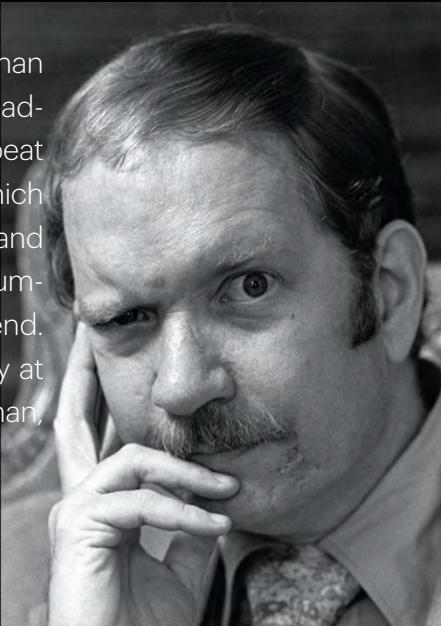
A-Plus Plus

Holly Ruprecht, our associate director of subscriptions for Playboy Plus, had quite a January. First she presided over a panel on brand partnerships alongside Plus models Elsa Jean and Ana Foxxx at the XBIZ trade show in West Hollywood (right), where Playboy Plus won the XBIZ award for nude photography site of the year. The following week Ruprecht booked it to Vegas for the AVN adult expo, where she repped the brand and sold limited-edition T-shirts featuring Plus models—and where Playboy Plus collected a GFY nomination for best erotic/soft site.



Farewell, Old Friend

For more than 50 years Gahan Wilson (right) kept PLAYBOY readers entertained with his offbeat and irreverent cartoons, which typically plumbed the dark and dusty corners of human circumstance, generally to hilarious end. In November he passed away at the age of 89. Good-bye, Gahan, and thanks for all the laughs.



Getting Jazzy in June



The Playboy Jazz Festival kicks off June 6 at the Hollywood Bowl for its 42nd year. Long-time host George Lopez will emcee the slammin' two-day slate of performances from musicians including the Isley Brothers (right), Musiq Soulchild (left), Femi Kuti and the Positive Force, Anat Cohen, Allison Miller and more. Get your tickets now at HollywoodBowl.com.





The Future Is Dorian Electra

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RICHIE TALBOY**



“Basically, I’m Einstein,” Dorian Electra quips. “Like, hello, I’m a genius.”

The pop artist, who uses gender-neutral pronouns, is recounting the time they traced the mathematical steps in Albert Einstein’s mass-energy equivalence formula, $E=mc^2$, in front of fellow students at a Chicago liberal arts college. How fulfilling it was at the time to understand, at least tangentially, the thought processes of the famed physicist. The particulars of the calculations are now a bit foggy. “I swear to God, I don’t have a good memory for details like that,” Electra says. “But I don’t think it was a waste of time. It gives me a boost. My ego is like, Yeah, one time I understood that.”

In an industry that favors those who play by the rules, this pop shape-shifter proves the power of defiant individuality

BY **ALLIE VOLPE**

Electra often performs such mental gymnastics, attempting to dissect complexities in music, gender expression and personal history. The 27-year-old can analyze memes and philosophical theories, or gender stereotypes and choreography, while playing their own devil’s advocate. They possess a mental stamina that never seems to wane. Frankly, being Dorian Electra is exhausting.

To be in their presence is anything but. Striking in an aquamarine blouse with a freshly dyed mullet to match, the artist brings a palpable vibrance to any room, both in this midtown Manhattan restaurant and, the following week, in the small East Williamsburg, Brooklyn venue where they’ll perform for two sold-out nights. In rapid-fire staccato sentences, Electra speaks on the intersection of entertainment and education, the entrepreneurial nature of working at a strip club and how they avoid the guilt that can accompany the choice to embody traditional elements of both masculinity and femininity. That last pairing is what the gender-fluid artist (their gender identity continually changes: “I’m masculine and feminine, I’m both, I’m neither, I don’t give a fuck”) celebrates on *Flamboyant*, their debut album.

Over a tight 31 minutes, *Flamboyant* wastes no time setting scenes. The listener is catapulted into Electra’s futuristic pop universe, where a vocalist can employ both falsetto and gritty chest belts, where hip-hop lives alongside baroque and heavy metal—often in the same song—and where a performer can wear suits and glitter, a penciled-on mustache and leather shorts. Without a road map, Electra acted on instinct and created music where there was none before. Now living in Los Angeles, they released *Flamboyant* independently this past summer. They also booked their own headlining tour last fall, had a run of dates opening for Charli XCX and handle most of their own press. Dorian Electra has always done things their own way.

“Dorian is so true to their self-expression, and that’s really rare in pop,” says queer artist and activist Mykki Blanco, who is featured alongside Electra on the Charli XCX track “Femmebot.” “Their creative control is admirable, and they’re really handling themselves well as far as controlling their narrative and creating original work for all of us to discover their world.”

Electra—born Dorian Electra Fridkin Gomberg—was raised in a liberal bubble in Houston by parents Paul, who works in real estate and performs in a cover band, and Paula, a musician, entrepreneur and jewelry maker. The couple bestowed a gender-neutral name on their only child, who wore it with pride.



Electra didn’t play with dolls but wasn’t into sports either. Instead, they experimented with performance, dressing up in drag and idolizing Austin Powers. “Part of the humor comes from the fact that he thinks he’s really sexy, but he’s gross,” Electra says. “That masculine ideal definitely shaped my personal sexual orientation or idea of gender. It’s way more on the Austin Powers side of the spectrum in terms of outlandish, ridiculous, kind of borderline grotesque.”

After Paul and Paula divorced when Electra was five, Paula dated women. Paul remarried, and Electra went to live with him and his new wife. Although Electra’s parents were open-minded—“We always had gay family friends, and someone in our family is trans; these things were just a normal part of our family life”—their conservative stepmother disapproved. She criticized Electra’s decision to eschew church, conduct a research project on HIV/AIDS and more.

In fourth grade, Electra tried theater. Hardly athletic, not quite skilled at drawing and stifled academically by attention deficit disorder, Electra found in musical theater a space in which they were praised for their talent. But telling other



For me, everything is a passing phase. Everything is always changing.”

people’s stories has its limits: The look, feel, tone and narrative arc are already determined. At 14, Electra discovered they could craft their own stories. Along with a friend, they created a fan video for the English band the Horrors, filmed on the friend’s MacBook webcam. Electra then began to use digital storytelling for school, writing songs and making videos for book reports and, eventually, research projects at Shimer College in Chicago. Without realizing it, they were carving a niche as an academic performance artist.

“It started as the perfect synthesis of all my interests. I love all this academic stuff,” Electra says. “It’s also a good mental exercise for me to break down these complex things in a way that can be accessible to many people in more casual, layperson terms.”

It was Electra’s video projects that caught the attention of the creative team at Refinery29. The women’s website commissioned the artist to make a sex-education video in 2015, granting them the freedom to create however they pleased. The result was a bubble-gum song and a video that sees Electra dressed in a clitoris costume, accompanied by backup dancers in vulva attire. The video was a hit—it won a Webby Award in 2017—so Refinery29 sent them off to make more. Electra returned with campy visual essays on the history of vibrators, drag, high heels and the marginalization of women, people of color and the trans and immigrant communities. In an age when memes proliferate at lightning speed on TikTok and editorial spaces have largely pivoted to video, Electra’s mastery of the medium proved to be vital to their career. It still is: The videos for “Flamboyant,” “Daddy Like,” “Man to Man” and “Career Boy” use storytelling to upend gender stereotypes.

While the video projects allowed Electra to explore the queer and feminist movements, they also led the artist to explore their own gender identity. During the 2016 production of a video on the history of drag, Electra befriended queer and trans people in Chicago, some of whom used *they/them* pronouns. Electra never identified with the term *nonbinary*, but *gender fluid*, with the way it paints gender as constantly morphing, felt right: “When I finally switched to *they/them*, it was really hard for me to ask people who had known me from before to use them,” Electra says. “And then everyone questions your authenticity, like ‘You’re just doing this for marketing purposes. You just feel like you want to be special.’ It happens to trans people too. They’re questioned: ‘Is this a passing phase?’ But for me, everything is a passing phase. Everything is always evolving and changing.”

Remaining in Chicago after college, Electra discovered how to use their body—for performance, for pleasure—as a server and topless dancer at a strip club. After answering a Craigslist ad for what they assumed was a catering gig, they were ushered onto a club floor wearing two layers of thongs, a skimpy fishnet dress and high heels, and carrying a handful of alcohol-filled test tubes. The tips from \$5 boob shots weren’t enough to pay the bills, so they opted for higher-paying private topless dances. One shift paid out more than Electra had ever earned before. “I never felt that confident in my body, because I was not this feminine-ideal type,” Electra says. “But these people are literally paying money to see me and my body and feel me grinding on them.”





It could have been an opportunity to rebel against traditional femininity, to shelve the attributes that appealed to the club's clientele, but Electra took to the role. Dancing for strangers felt sexy; it was a turn-on.

"I've actually embraced those gendered ideas," they say. "I spent so many years in college and after trying to socialize myself into those things that now I've accepted them, and I'm learning to be okay with enjoying them too. There's nothing wrong with me wanting to feel really feminine or submissive, or the opposite—because I also felt a lot of guilt about that once I started getting into feminism and then discovered my own gender identity. I'm like, Wait, is this at odds with my gender identity?"

Electra took their own feminine parts, as well as the camp and garishness of male idols David Bowie and Austin Powers, to create a new kind of pop star—one who cheekily insists on being called "Mister" and subverts the accepted meaning of flamboyance into an on-the-nose personal treatise. "It's this idea of whimsical self-awareness," they say. While many artists (Lady Gaga, Björk) use grandeur as a means of expression, Electra uses humor and rebellion as a guide to usher in what Blanco describes as "a new generation of queer talent who will be judged not on the politics of their identity but hopefully on the quality and awesomeness of their music and creative merits."

This is the Dorian Electra who lives on *Flamboyant*, unbounded by genre or gender. In the early months of 2019, the artist and six producers crafted the majority of the album. Some of that time was spent in a Las Vegas Airbnb where Electra

would bounce from room to room, going to each collaborator whenever the session's energy dulled. Full of outrageously glossy club music that uses gender as performance, *Flamboyant* challenges the confines of conventional pop. On stage the songs come to life through choreography, Electra's chameleonic vocal stylings and smoldering glances to the audience, and two bearded backup dancers, all three performers dressed in intergalactic-gladiator bondage gear.

Whether blending harpsichord and dubstep beats—and somehow managing to make the result sound cohesive—or taping their breasts in photo shoots, Electra wants to challenge audiences. "I know my voice is really annoying and off-putting," they say. "But I'd rather risk alienating people because of that than not excite them because my voice was forgettable."

You would be remiss to forget Electra. In fact, it might be impossible. You can hear their mind racing in real time, witness them stumbling onto a theoretical discovery they hadn't before considered. You can see their past and future painted in the details of their words.

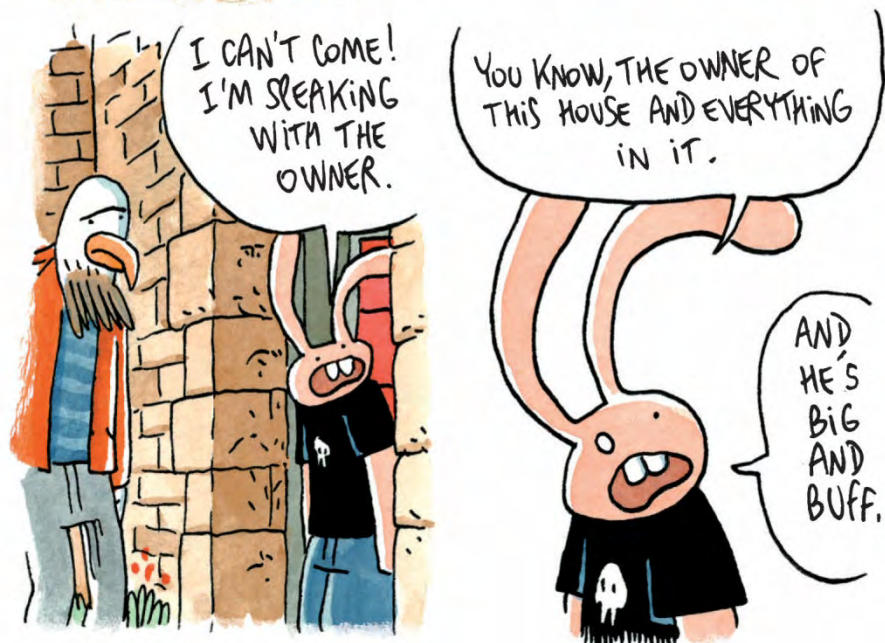
Electra has an afternoon of unscheduled nothingness following our interview, though I suspect they don't need a plan to know where they're going, in the moment or in general. "The thesis of what I believe is everything's way more complex than people want to make it," they say. "Things change and evolve, and that's why fluidity in all areas seems to make the most sense to me as my life philosophy."

There's nothing concrete in the world of Dorian Electra. There never was, and if we're lucky, there never will be.



The Lure of a Locked Door

A PASTORAL ADVENTURE OF LAPINOT AND RICHARD BY LEWIS TRONDHEIM





HEY, I COULDN'T HEAR YOU... I WAS READING AN OLD PLAYBOY I FOUND!

WE COULD PRANK A DOCTOR BY LEAVING IT IN THEIR WAITING ROOM.



WHO'S THIS? MR. GROUET, THE OWNER OF THIS PLACE.

THE OWNER? DID YOU COME BACK FOR A CHANGE OF UNDERWEAR? HEY! THAT WOULDN'T BE ONE OF MY PLAYBOY MAGAZINES, WOULD IT?



OOOOOH... NO... I FOUND IT AT A... YARD SALE, IN A PILE OF OLD BIBLES, AND IT WAS CALLING TO ME "HELP, HELP..."

OH REALLY? I'M STILL GOING TO CHECK MY CLOSET TO SEE IF MY COPY IS THERE.



HEY! YOUR NAME IS GROUET - LIKE THE MIDDLE AGES FARMER FROM AROUND HERE WHO KILLED THE LORD OF THE MANOR?

I'M A DESCENDANT OF HIS, YES...



STAY HERE! I'M GOING TO FIND A PIECE OF PAPER TO GET YOUR AUTOGRAPH.



CLICK CLACK



WHAT IS HE TALKING ABOUT, THIS GUY?

WHERE DID HE GO?



GRR... ALL RIGHT.

MY COPY IS HERE!

HEY, I FOUND A PIECE OF PAPER!



YOU CAN SAY, "MR. GROUET, DESCENDANT OF THE AWFUL 13th CENTURY MURDERER..."

NO! AH, YEAH, IT DOESN'T SOUND COOL... ALL RIGHT: "MR. GROUET, DESCENDANT OF THE AWFUL 13th CENTURY MURDERER WHO ALSO HAS A COPY OF PLAYBOY IN HIS HOUSE"?



GRRR...

I HOPE THIS TEACHES YOU A LESSON AND THAT YOU'LL BEHAVE IN THIS HOUSE.

FOR SURE!



HEY! IT'S A REAL WELL!!

THINK WE CAN CLIMB TO THE BOTTOM USING A MAKESHIFT CORD MADE OUT OF THE LIVING ROOM CURTAINS?



what's in
a name?





**The cannabis world
ponders whether
legalization and
scientific advances will
put an end to colorfully
named strains (looking
at you, Sour Diesel)**

BY MICHELLE LHOQQ

The names of familiar cannabis strains are intertwined with particular phases of my life. I think of them fondly, like old friends: Sour Diesel, the East Coast stalwart that kept me buzzed through college, our covert relationship conducted behind dorm room doors. Panama Red, the old-school hippie I fell in love with one sticky summer in New York. Blue Dream, the ethereal It girl that keeps showing up at parties in Los Angeles. There's a thrill in discovering strains that light up my body's chemistry; intimacy grows with the ones I seek out again and again.

But the allegation, heard in cannabis-friendly circles and the media, that such names are a big scam haunts me. Perhaps this conversation begins with the scientifically backed discovery that classifying strains as sativa or indica is bunk, given that decades of cross-pollination between the two subspecies has transformed most of today's strains into hybrids. Researchers at the University of Northern Colorado's School of Biological Sciences tested the DNA of 30 cannabis strains to find not only that sativa/indica is a false binary but that strains of the same name can display widespread genetic inconsistencies. Even ostensibly identical strains grown by different breeders under variable soil and weather conditions can have divergent chemical profiles. So if two jars of Durban Poison can take on dissimilar tastes and effects when grown by two different brands, does that mean cannabis names reveal absolutely nothing?

"Names are just not relevant anymore," says Erica Kay, founder and CEO of Cornerstone Wellness dispensary. Back in the day, Kay explains, the cannabis strains believed to be the oldest—Hindu Kush, Afghani, Thai, Aceh and Nepalese—were named after their birthplaces in Central and South Asia. These indigenous strains, known as landraces, were the ancestors to the thousands of hybrids we smoke today—and back then, there were distinct differences between sativas (tall plants with buzzier highs) and indicas (bushy plants with sedative effects). Over

generations these landraces were cross-bred to bring out desirable traits such as shorter flowering times, higher THC levels and exceptional highs, and the historical differences between sativas and indicas were subsequently blurred.

"Plants have personalities, and cannabis is a diva," says Eleanor Kuntz, co-founder and CEO of plant genetics company LeafWorks, noting how the drug can trace its migration through an incredible array of cultural groups. "I don't know of many other plants that have such a dynamic past." Some cannabis strain names are therefore still useful references to their heritage, including their parent strains or the famous breeders who created them.

Strain names can also reference color, flavor and effect, with the most successful ones birthing new trends. Chemdog, a pioneering 1990s strain popularized at Grateful Dead concerts, was named for its pungent, chemical-like taste; it's believed to have played predecessor to Sour Diesel, which brought skunky-smelling "sativas" back in vogue. Granddaddy Purple sparked the purple-cannabis craze, further promoted in the 2000s and early 2010s with tracks like A\$AP Rocky's "Purple Swag" and Cam'ron's album *Purple Haze*.

And if edgier names like Green Crack and Alaskan Thunderfuck have long basked in notorious glory, the pendulum





is now swinging toward more mainstream-friendly dessert names. “This is largely due to the Girl Scout Cookies phenomenon,” explains Pete Pietrangeli, product development manager for Indus Holdings, Inc. Sweet and earthy, known for its orange and purple hues, the Girl Scout Cookie strain preceded the birth of newly popular specimens including Gelato, Sorbet and Wedding Cake. “People love taking a rip and pointing out the similarities in flavor profile,” he says.

Other brands, such as Canndescent, eschew conventional names in favor of effect-based ones like Calm, Cruise and Connect. “Having names like Durban Poison and Trainwreck presents a real problem,” says Canndescent CEO Adrian Sedlin. “What we’ve tried to do is take all this counterculture code and then create some meaning that other people can understand.”

But as strain names proliferate, there are no regulations to stop a grower or dispensary from selling an average strain under a trendier, higher-value name. Kuntz says, “A broker comes to you and asks, ‘What strains do you have?’ And your response is, ‘What are you buying?’” She continues, “If you can get \$200 more a pound for a particular strain name, you’ll pass it off as that. There’s a lot of fraud, basically.”

Of course there are basic government controls on cannabis quality and safety, but unethical labeling can be deadly serious for medical patients seeking particular strains to treat their symptoms. It can also lead to wild marketing, like snake oil salesmen selling strains they claim can kill cancer.

David Bienenstock, veteran cannabis journalist and co-host of the podcast *Great Moments in Weed History*, disagrees. “Strain misidentification definitely happens, but not as much as people think and definitely much less so if you’re buying from a licensed dispensary in a legal state,” he says. “Often this is an honest mistake, as it’s sometimes difficult to verify a strain since so much cannabis breeding took place underground.”

Therein lies one of cannabis culture’s greatest conundrums: The secrecy and myth that make cannabis history so sexy are exactly what’s confounding its current transition to the mainstream market. Without science-backed databases, regulatory watchdogs and well-researched histories, the celebrity-strain industrial complex rests on a murky swamp of unscrupulous

marketing and even outright consumer fraud.

Existing databases such as Leafly, Wikileaf and CannaConnection list thousands of strain etymologies, but these resources largely lack scientific merit and regulatory authority. “We do not have the means and methods to verify the consistency of strains, and we heavily depend on the information given by breeders,” says CannaConnection’s Renzo Alexander. “Many so-called breeders are just commercial companies that buy a certain strain from a wholesale company and give it a new name.”

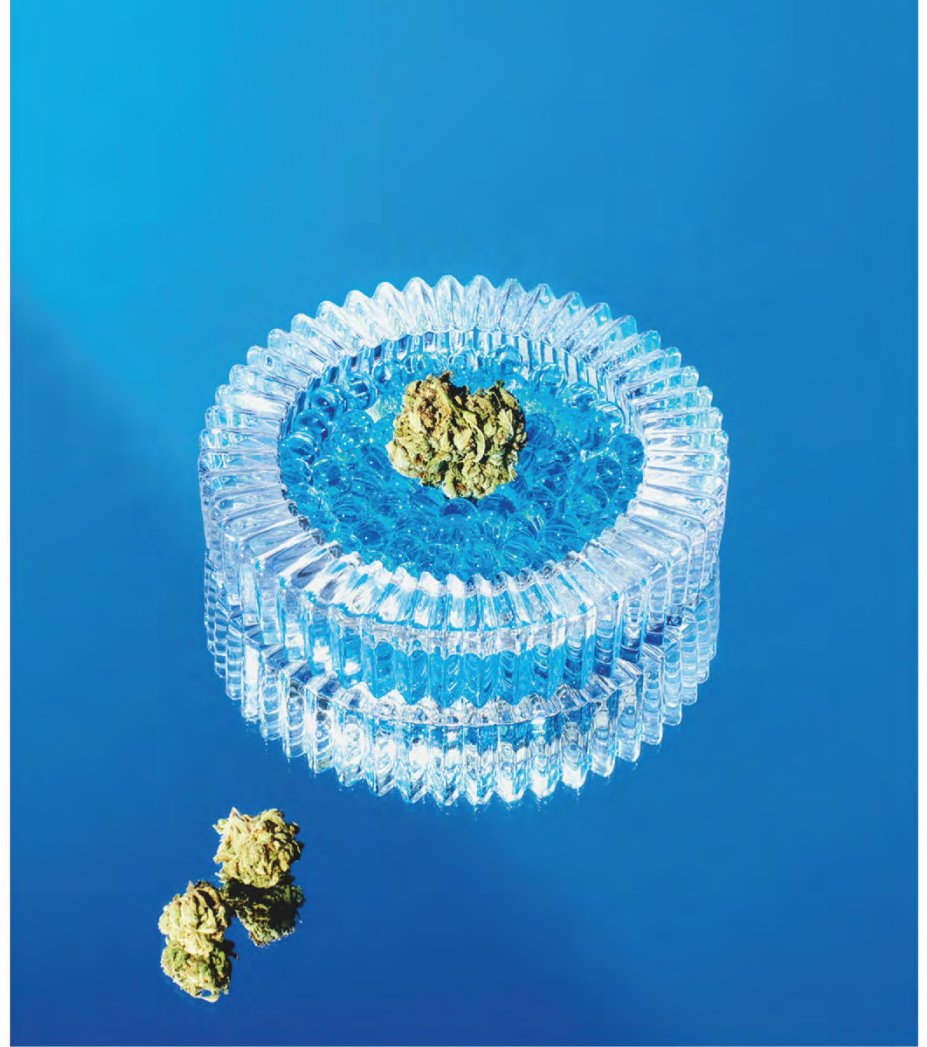
Trust issues continue to dog the industry: A much-hyped attempt to build an accurate strain database led by Phylos Bioscience recently imploded when the company revealed plans to begin its own breeding program. Growers who had submitted genomic data to Phylos were outraged, fearful that their information would be used to develop strains without their consent.

Experts are racing to figure out solutions—especially with the emerging field of cannabis-strain patents. LeafWorks, a newly launched botanical-identification company run by Kuntz and a scientist-led team, developed a DNA test to cross-reference buds against registered strains in their database. LeafWorks partners with a nonprofit herbarium called Canndor to preserve physical specimens in hopes of creating strain definitions verifiable through DNA and documentation. While DNA is not currently required to patent a strain, the company claims this kind of supplemental data lays the groundwork for legal protection.

Beyond the outdated distinction between sativa and indica, the word *strain* itself may be irrelevant. “Strains are meant to describe microorganisms, like bacteria, fungi and viruses,” says Kay. “Chemovars, chemotypes and cultivars are better-accepted terms to describe cannabis.”

Dr. Ethan Russo, a cannabis research pioneer and medical director of biotechnology company Phytects, puts it more bluntly: “It has been clear to scientists for a long time that strain names are extremely unreliable.”

For now, it seems the best way to beat the strain-name scam is to purchase your cannabis from the same grower at a licensed dispensary—or better yet, grow your own. Until the industry is able to come up with better ways to verify strains, document their histories and form regulatory bodies, a strain by any other name could just be savvy marketing—and would smell as sweet. 🍃





left for *dead*

ILLUSTRATION BY SPIROS HALARIS

halaris



**Amid right-wing
criticism—and a Trump
tweet—Universal
shelved its film *The
Hunt*. Now the director
breaks his silence
on why everything
you know about the
movie is wrong**

BY RYAN GAJEWSKI

Name your favorite thriller of the past year. If *The Hunt* doesn't come to mind, it's not because you're behind the times. The film, which boasts a top-notch cast and filmmaking pedigree, wasn't on your best-of-2019 list because you still haven't seen it—and neither have the people who helped prevent you from seeing it.

Produced by horror master Jason Blum and co-written by Damon Lindelof and Nick Cuse (who both worked on *Watchmen* and *The Leftovers*), *The Hunt* was set for theatrical release from Universal on September 27. A trailer that dropped in July sketched out a plot in which Betty Gilpin, Emma Roberts and Justin Hartley band together against a diabolical overlord played by Hilary Swank.

On August 3, a shooting motivated by anti-immigrant hatred left 22 people dead in El Paso. Days later, a story from *The Hollywood Reporter* stated that networks were pulling ads for the film in light of the tragedy. As reports surfaced that the plot revolved around liberals hunting conservatives for sport, right-wing pundits pounced. Trump, presumably responding to heavy Fox News coverage, tweeted about the film on August 9 without mentioning it by name. "Liberal Hollywood is racist at the highest level," Trump wrote. "The movie coming out is made in order to inflame and cause chaos."

The day after the president's tweet, Universal announced it was pulling the movie from its schedule. The studio said it stood by the filmmakers, but "now is not the right time to release this film." At press time, *The Hunt* remains in limbo, with no updates on whether it will see the light of day.

• • •

"There's no way for that not to be a weird day in your life," *The Hunt* director Craig Zobel tells PLAYBOY, reflecting on the Trump tweet. "To have the world aimed at you because the president aimed it at you is a very, very, very strange thing."

It's mid-January, five months after the film's release was canceled, and Zobel has invited me to spend time with him in Philadelphia. He relocated there from Athens, Georgia to take over directing duties on the HBO limited series *Mare of Easttown*. It's his first job since the drama with *The Hunt* led him to take a break from directing. We've been friends since I was his student in a screenwriting class back in 2010, and he's granting me his first press sit-down since the hysteria subsided.

It wasn't easy scheduling this time with the 44-year-old filmmaker. As the furor surrounding his movie started to build in

early August, and just days before it was pulled, I e-mailed him to see if he'd like to address the situation. He didn't respond until early October, at which point he apologized for the delay and said he'd love to chat at some point. On the day after Christmas he let me know he had just landed the *Mare* gig and asked if I could fly out to the City of Brotherly Love.

Meeting at a bar around midnight on the night I land, we quickly fall back into a familiar movie-nerd rapport. It's immediately clear that the past year has been an incredibly trying one for Zobel, one he's been unsure about discussing with me despite our long history. (He wasn't the only person reluctant to discuss the film; every one of its leads declined to talk for this piece.) In fact, it wasn't a foregone conclusion that he would accept this current HBO job, and not just because of the *Hunt* turmoil. While he was in post-production on that film, Zobel and his girlfriend of 16 years split, his work schedule and frequent travel having taken a toll on the relationship.

"The breakup happened, and then I was like, 'At least the movie's good,'" he quietly tells me the next day from his office in Sun Center Studios, about half an hour outside downtown Philly. He's been spending his weekends here, holed up in the show's edit bay. "Then the movie blew up. I was like, I'm not prepared to actually do anything right now. When HBO called, I didn't think I was ready at first. Then I reconsidered and thought, Maybe I should work. Maybe that will help. To be honest, it has."

• • •

In early August, when the movie "blew up," Twitter was awash in hot takes.



Some posited that Universal should have expected this kind of uproar. But Zobel assures me the studio never expressed concern before August and had been supportive throughout the filmmaking process, in part, he maintains, because the movie they made is not what people think it is.

"It's a fun, satirical action movie about an internet conspiracy theory," Zobel explains. "The plot is that both sides are dumb. It's not 'Shame on MAGA supporters; we liberal elites want to teach them a lesson.' That was the narrative that truly got created by the rightest of the right-wing media in the wake of the El Paso shooting. Once they needed the message 'It's not guns' fault; it's movies' and video games' and TV's fault,' we were a great foil."

Having read *The Hunt*'s screenplay, I can attest that the project is not what the pitchfork-wielding mobs would have you believe. This is corroborated by filmmaker Josh Locy, one of the very few people who have actually caught a screening.

"When you see the movie—and there are a lot of interpretations of it—to me, it's about liberal hypocrisy," Locy tells me. "The heroes of the movie are the MAGA-hat people—they're who you're rooting for. It flips the script."

As it happens, a key plot point involves an online post getting blown out of proportion. "The movie is about how someone on the internet can say one thing, it can get pulled out of context and then lives and careers are at stake," adds Locy, a writer on HBO's *The Righteous Gemstones*. "And that's exactly what Universal did. They let this internet troll, who happens to be our president, dictate their slate of movies. They had an opportunity to embrace free speech and didn't, out of fear."

First and foremost Zobel just wants the damn film to be seen—and clearly he's not the only person who thinks the public should get to make up its own mind. A source familiar with the negotiations tells *PLAYBOY* that Blum's company, Blumhouse Productions, has fielded offers from multiple streaming platforms above the film's \$17 million production costs to acquire distribution rights. At the moment Universal still holds those rights.

According to Zobel, more than the nature of the plot has been distorted. A rumor spread in the media and online that the film was originally called *Red State vs. Blue State*, which led Universal

to issue a denial that the film had ever held this title. Zobel is still uncertain how the notion started.

"That title became one of the reasons it was seen as such an incendiary, bad movie," the director says. "I remember calling Nick and Damon and asking, 'Was it ever called *Red State vs. Blue State*?' Nick's like, 'No, that's a terrible name for a movie.' So that was just made up, and then I have people tweeting at me, 'You want to make a movie about red state vs. blue state? We'll show you red state vs. blue state.'"

Zobel says he received death threats after Trump's tweet, though he didn't take them too seriously, and they didn't change his mind about the film. "There were Twitter accounts that had been open for three days that had nothing but anti-Craig Zobel tweets," he says. "Still, I absolutely don't want to change any-

thing, and no one has asked me to. It will be even more interesting when people see it."

...

When Seth Rogen says, "It sucks when an evil world leader gets your movie canceled," it would be fair to assume he's talking about his own film *The Interview*. After all, the comedy about an attempt to assassinate Kim Jong-un was pulled from Sony's release calendar in 2014 amid an internal hack on the studio credited to North Korea. But no, the quote is actually something Rogen said in August about *The Hunt*—and a grim reminder of history's tendency to repeat itself.

The Hunt is hardly the first film to face ex-

ternal obstacles impacting its release. *The Interview* was kept out of major theater chains; *Collateral Damage*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, was delayed after 9/11 because of its terrorism theme; *Dr. Strangelove*'s release date was pushed after the JFK assassination; *A Clockwork Orange* was pulled from theaters in the U.K. after the film's director, Stanley Kubrick, expressed concern about copycat crimes.

Among the people I spoke with, including free-speech lawyers and film historians, the comparison that kept coming up was the fearmongering that gripped the U.S. during the McCarthyism period of the 1950s. We're not there yet, but the notion that a filmmaker today could get blacklisted for running afoul of government narratives doesn't seem farfetched. As it is, this era in cinema is focused almost entirely on intellectual-

**"The plot is
not 'Shame
on MAGA
supporters; we
liberal elites
want to teach
them a lesson.'"**



property franchises, and projects that take creative risks tend to be relegated to streaming.

“When companies start banning or dropping films because they’re afraid of their social content, that’s a bad sign,” says Joseph McBride, who worked as a Hollywood screenwriter for 18 years, on *Rock ’n’ Roll High School* and other films. “Hollywood is terribly afraid of social issues, even today. I wanted to do a Fidel Castro biopic and had a very fun idea for it. You can imagine what kind of reaction I got.”

These days, Trump’s wrath can be aimed not only at political foes but at any element of the media that has irked him. In March 2019 the president doubled down on his criticism of *Saturday Night Live* by branding the show “one-sided media coverage” and asking, “Should Federal Election Commission and/or FCC look into this?” In December, Amazon claimed it had lost out on a multibillion-dollar cloud contract due to Trump’s attacks on the company and its founder, Jeff Bezos. (Bezos owns *The Washington Post*, a frequent target of Trump’s vitriol.) And Trump has been a vocal critic of former NFL star Colin Kaepernick, who remains unemployed by the league after kneeling during the national anthem to protest police injustice.

A key difference between today’s era and previous ones is the sense that Twitter, Trump’s weapon of choice, can amplify the concerns of a fringe group or give a false read of the national temperature. Take, for example, Warner Bros.’ villain-origin tale *Joker*, which stirred up prerelease panic on social media that the gritty movie could lead to real-world violence. Warner stood its ground and released the film in October as planned; it went on to become the highest-grossing R-rated movie of all time and the recipient of more Oscar nominations than any other 2019 title. Of course Warner would have known a movie like *Joker*, with its built-in audience, would likely be a high earner, something that’s less certain with an original concept à la *The Hunt*.

“When the studios confront this kind of resistance, if they see it operating not in their financial interest, they’ll fold like a cheap suit,” says Thomas Doherty,

cultural historian and author of *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist*. “We’re in another time right now where producers, distributors and exhibitors feel that same blacklist-like sense of fear.”

...

For Zobel, there’s a hint of familiarity to all this. After his 2007 film *Great World of Sound* earned the breakthrough director prize at the Gotham Awards, he went on to make 2012’s *Compliance*. (I have an IMDb credit for helping out on the set.) It’s based on a true story of a fast-food manager, played by Ann Dowd in a breakout role, ordering a strip search of a young female employee at the behest of a police impersonator. Dubbed by the *Daily Beast* “the year’s most controversial film,” *Compliance* would serve as Zobel’s introduction to polarizing reactions to his work.

When I reconnect with Dowd to tell her I’m writing about *The Hunt*, she couldn’t be more encouraging. The Emmy-winning actress—known for playing the *Handmaid’s Tale* monster Aunt Lydia, a character Michelle Wolf famously compared to then White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders during the 2018 White House Correspondents’ Dinner—is quick to point out the hypocrisy of Trump condemning a movie about gun violence when he’s unwilling to stand up to the NRA.

“The fact that Trump has anything to say on the matter is so ridiculous,” says Dowd, who reunited with Zobel when he directed episodes of *The Leftovers*. “What Craig would support, I would support without taking a beat, and I don’t think it’s anybody’s place to censor what is to be released and what isn’t. People have a choice to go or not to go—that’s up to them. You have to be courageous, and if you’re trusting a director enough to hire him, then fulfill your obligation. It’s unacceptable.”

A telling difference between the two films is that Zobel traveled the country with *Compliance* and held Q&As to promote discourse about its challenging themes. That wasn’t possible just seven years later with *The Hunt*, both because of the Twitter threats and, well, because there was no film to promote. “As a culture, something got darker,” he says.

Kathy Griffin said as much when she sat for the *Playboy* Interview in 2018. The boundary-pushing comedian saw her career path change irrevocably when she posted an image in 2017 of herself holding a facsimile of Trump’s severed head. “I was not a George W. Bush fan, but it was nothing like this during W.’s presidency,” Griffin said. “During W. you could still make jokes about the president.”

Zobel’s most introspective moment comes when I ask whether the uproar that led to the film being shelved would have happened under a different commander in chief. “I think about this question all the time,” he replies. “I live in Georgia, I made a TV show in Pittsburgh, I’m making one now in Philly—and Pennsylvania isn’t Hollywood. I find it enlightening how much similarity I have with people who hold different political views from mine. That was part of the spirit of the movie: In reality, we’re not that far apart.”

He sighs heavily. “But now I don’t have high hopes, to be honest. Changing the president isn’t going to fix that. As a culture, we have to make a choice that we don’t want to be like that.” 



Man in His Domain

Compton Cowboys





The morning sun is just beginning to peek out over the horizon, dyeing the sky over Compton a soft pink. Roosters are crowing, announcing the start of a new day on the quiet house-lined street. As I step out of my car my first thought is that I must be in the wrong place; there's no way this is the address of a cowboy ranch.

I hear an unfamiliar *clop clop* approaching, and I turn to see a young black man in a hoodie, tattooed and with dreadlocks, trotting down the center of the street atop a dark horse—a restless Tennessee walker whose name I'll later find out is Ebony. The man regards me coolly as he saunters past, exhaling a small plume of smoke. He looks no more out of place against this

urban backdrop than the cars that cruise alongside. I feel as though I've stepped into an old Western film, albeit one in which the cowboys and cowgirls look less like John Wayne and more like me.

The Compton Cowboys, a group of 10 friends who grew up riding together, operate out of Richland Farms, a two-acre spread tucked behind the houses on this unassuming block. Formally launched less than three years ago, the outfit has made a name for itself in and outside of Compton by reintroducing—yes, reintroducing—cowboy culture to black urban communities.

"The ranch you're on is 30 years of work," says Randall Hook once he has brought me past the gates of his family's rambler and into a broad backyard lined

with stables. Also known as Randy Savvy, Hook is the managing member of the Compton Cowboys. "My brother and I were born into the horse thing," he says. The rest of the group consists of friends, family members and curious locals.

Hook inherited Richland Farms from his aunt Mayisha Akbar, a longtime equestrian. In 1988 Akbar founded a youth-focused program called the Compton Junior Posse, which served as a precursor to the Compton Cowboys; it was where many of the current riders met as children trying to escape the dangers of their neighborhood. (Akbar was forced to hand over the reins after she suffered a stroke.)

"It's crazy out there in the streets," says Hook. "I don't even like standing in front of my house. You end up growing up with people, and they get killed or go to jail. You see somebody, then you just never see him again. Riding takes you away from the bullshit of the world and just helps you grow and develop yourself as you naturally would. When you're in the ranch, the bullshit can't see you."

Lil Ant, a Compton Cowboy and former member of the Acacia Blocc Crips gang, says the ranch helped him transition back into society after completing a two-year sentence for drug dealing.

"I'd rather hang with the horses; that's my passion now," he says. "Once you've been in jail, you can't go back to the same thing. I had to change it up. I love my horses, so I picked that."

He eventually purchased a Tennessee walker named Sugarfoot for his young children, who have since become avid riders.

In Compton, Richland Farms is much more than a ranch; it's a major pillar of an underserved community that's often plagued by violence. It's a refuge for Compton youth looking for a place to belong that isn't gang-affiliated, and it's a resource for those same youth to learn leadership skills and

**Where have all the
cowboys gone?
South Los Angeles,
it turns out. A
Compton-based
nonprofit reframes
a whitewashed
way of life**

BY ANITA LITTLE



build self-esteem. In the confines of this spread, with its 16 horses, three cows and one affable llama, members rehabilitate the often-donated horses and train for rodeo competitions and the show-jumping circuit. Watching it all, I feel transported. I feel safe.

Keiara, the only cowgirl in the Compton Cowboys, competes in rodeos throughout the state. She's often one of the few riders of color out of several hundred. "No one acknowledged me until I started winning," she says.

Hook speaks proudly of one of the program's mentees: "We've got a young kid that came in real rough. Wild, young little boy. He's only been in this for two years now, and he's already winning rodeos out of state as a teenager. Talk to him now, he wants to be a professional bull rider. He wears his belt buckle to school."

He goes on: "His mom, she hit me up, saying, 'You saved my son's life. Thank you.' If you're able to change one life, you've already made it."

The Compton Cowboys' slogan—Streets Raised Us, Horses Saved Us—feels especially fitting in light of stories like this. But horses don't pay rent. How can the Cowboys keep the stable doors open without compromising their



Opening pages, from left: Compton Cowboys CeeJay, Randy Savvy, Keiara, Stona Mane, Tre Hosley, Lay, T-Man, Carlton and Lil Ant. **This page, from top:** Lay, T-Man, CeeJay and Randy Savvy at Richland Farms; Tre in the paddock; Stona Mane, Lil Ant and T-Man saddling up.



mission amid the city's constant socioeconomic stampedes?

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When Hook became manager of the ranch, he was saddled with a deep financial responsibility. "I'm always pressed for operating dollars," he says.

Taking care of horses isn't cheap: Akbar typically raised \$30,000 a month in funding, mostly from wealthy white patrons, to keep the operation running. The biggest challenge to her successor is making the ranch financially independent. Hook, who had recently earned his master's degree in music administration when he took over, decided they would rely less on others' largesse than on the ranch's cowboy coolness—raising revenue through storytelling and branding.

"You can go door to door and it'll take you some time, but you can get the word out," Hook says. "Or you could do one fucking commercial, and now you're in front of millions of people in 60 seconds."

Over the past year and a half, the Compton Cowboys have focused on becoming a self-sustaining enterprise, signing advertising deals with companies from Guinness and Adidas to Zara and Boot Barn, with even more in the pipeline. Their website boasts a wide collection of original merch—COMPTON COWBOYS emblazoned in Old English lettering across beanies and hoodies. The group has a self-titled book coming

in mid-spring from HarperCollins. And an upcoming feature film based on their lives, written by Prentice Penny, the showrunner behind HBO's *Insecure*, will be backed by Fox Searchlight Pictures. The Cowboys are well on their way to household-name status.

Hook is struggling to decide whether becoming a pop-culture phenomenon will actually translate into the longevity they need to preserve their way of life—a way of life both well established and almost entirely erased.

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Most Americans would be surprised to learn that black riders are nothing new; they were an integral part of the Old West. The Compton Cowboys are simply a continuation of a centuries-long legacy that has been painstakingly excised from our country's history.

Roger Hardaway, a professor of history at Northwestern Oklahoma State University and an expert on the Old West, has dedicated much of his scholarship to unearthing the forgotten story of black cowboys. He paints a picture of Texas, a former slave state where countless stray cattle, abandoned by owners who left to fight in the Civil War, roamed the Great Plains.

"They belonged basically to nobody, so you could make some money rounding them up," Hardaway says. "This created thousands of cowboy jobs, and a lot of African Americans took those jobs. They had room and board all taken care of, and they'd make maybe \$15 a month, which was a lot of money for somebody who was single."

For recently freed male slaves, becoming a cowboy was the best job they could hope for. They migrated west in droves. At the height of the industry, before the advent of the railroad eliminated the need for long-distance cattle drives, an estimated one in four cowboys was black.

"It was a magical transition to go from a Southern farm to a Texas range," says Hardaway.

It wasn't just the Old West: African Americans also made their presence known in the high-society culture of horse racing, often placing in the winners' circle at the Kentucky Derby in the event's first three decades. But by the early 1900s Jim Crow had forced them out.

In Hollywood one would be hard-pressed to find a nonwhite cowboy in any of the classic Westerns offering steely-eyed Eastwoods and Elliotts gripping six-shooters and glaring at the camera from beneath wide-brimmed Stetsons. This despite the long-held belief (disputed by some historians) that *The Lone Ranger*, the iconic saga that spanned radio, TV and the big screen starting in the 1930s, was based on the true story of Bass Reeves, a freed slave who made his fortune hunting outlaws in the Wild West.

"In the Hollywood context, the removal of black cowboys serves to deny the important black contributions on the cutting edge of frontier expansion," says Artel Great, a historian of black cinema and a film studies professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. "The image of the valiant white cowboy dominates the nation's social imagination, encouraging viewers to reverse the harsh and bitter truths of America's violent history."

Great adds that we should reinterrogate the term *cowboy* itself. "Black ranch hands were not called cattlemen like their white counterparts but rather were pejoratively deemed cowboys, perpetuating the racist practice of referring to black men as boys."

There's something powerful and subversive about the image of a black body atop a horse. As I watch the Compton Cowboys

Below: Kee living the brand—merchandise is an increasingly important part of the Cowboys' business model. **Opposite:** A lone rider surveys the sun rising over Compton.





practice in their small paddock against a backdrop of graying sky, I immediately understand why such images were scrubbed from America's tracks, screens and history books.

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But the whitewashed narrative of the West is shifting. The past few years have seen a resurgence of African Americans reclaiming the ranch aesthetic and making it their own. Solange and Beyoncé have used cowboy imagery in their recent projects: "Daddy Lessons," Bey's hit from *Lemonade*, features the singer's first foray into the country music genre, and Solange's visual component to the album *When I Get Home* borrows symbolism commonly associated with her home state of Texas. Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B and other tastemakers helped make chaps the fashion statement of 2019. And of course there's Lil Nas X, the artist whose single "Old Town Road" likely

played the biggest part in the black cowboy's emergence into the internet mainstream.

This all coalesced with the birth of the #YeeHawAgenda, a viral hashtag created by Bri Malandro, who's often described as a "pop culture archivist." Malandro tells me she didn't learn much about cowboys in school, least of all black cowboys, and wanted to discover the history for herself.

"My first introduction to the American West may have been watching *Walker, Texas Ranger* with my grandmother," Malandro says. "Once I saw how people were reacting to the black cowboy aesthetic—like it was something they'd never seen before—I started to archive those moments."

So the Compton Cowboys find themselves in an opportune moment—but as Hook repeatedly says, they're not just hopping on a trend.

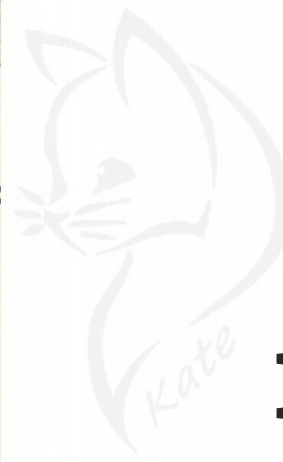
"People think we're new, or they think we're the ones co-opting a popular culture. We've been doing it; our life is this. We just grew up, and we just happen to be here now in line with this moment that's happening."

All the recent attention is fine and dandy to the group, but more than anything it's a means of securing the future of the Cowboys. Hook spends a lot of time thinking about what lies ahead for his band of riders. Much of his cowboy philosophy seems to revolve around being a good steward—of animals and of the community.

"Being a cowboy means being responsible for all things nature," he says. "Being responsible for the stuff that's here before us, paying it forward to the next generation."

Judging by the bright-eyed look of a young boy I see running up to the stables as I'm leaving, that's already happening.





WORDS MATTER

An inveterate civil-rights activist and former ACLU president argues that even with the evolving dangers of social media, unrestrained free speech remains the key to democracy

BY **NADINE STROSSEN**

My father was a Holocaust survivor who barely survived slave labor in the Buchenwald concentration camp. My maternal grandfather was an immigrant to the United States who was subjected to degrading punishment because he was a conscientious objector during World War I. And so I've always possessed a strong sense of injustice, and I've welcomed every opportunity to speak out against it.

As a teen I traveled to different high schools in my area, debating against the Vietnam war before school-wide assemblies. Those experiences played a crucial formative role by introducing me to the law. I realized that legal tools could reduce the discriminatory human rights violations that had always upset me. It sounds corny to say that many of us went to law school at that time to change the world, but it's true—and despite the ongoing challenges, the overall human rights situation in the U.S. and worldwide is vastly better now than it was when I graduated from law school. I say this not so we crusaders can rest on our laurels but for the opposite reason: to remind us that we can confidently look forward to further human rights gains if we persist in our efforts. But those gains will not be possible if our First Amendment rights are violated.

Freedom of speech means we should be free to choose what to say and listen to—as well as what we're *not* going to say or listen to. I should be free from constraints at the hands of any individual or entity powerful enough to exert those constraints, whether it's the government, a social media behemoth, a university official or a mob.

The American Civil Liberties Union continues to defend freedom of speech even for those who use that freedom to challenge our deeply held values with regard to civil liberties. Probably our most infamous case was defending the right of neo-Nazis to demonstrate in Skokie, Illinois—which had a large Jewish population, including many Holocaust survivors—in 1977. We did the

same thing in Charlottesville, Virginia four decades later, defending free speech for white supremacist demonstrators. These positions have been strongly criticized, even by many ACLU members. But we're also continually attacked from other quarters for our defense of the free speech rights of crusaders for racial justice. For example, we're currently defending Black Lives Matter activist DeRay Mckesson against allegations that his speech instigated anti-police violence. I take these diverse criticisms as a rough indicator that we're getting it right.

Many people are understandably concerned about disinformation, which of course can undermine the integrity of elections and jeopardize our form of government. But before turning to censorship in the hope of reducing these threats, we must consider the countervailing harm that such censorship would cause. Empowering the government or social media giants to decide

what's true and what's false is far more dangerous: It's easy to see the potential damage to speech, but censorship inevitably vests enforcers with discretion to choose which words and speakers to punish. This power is always wielded disproportionately against government critics, dissidents and advocates of reform.

Donald Trump certainly didn't forfeit his free speech rights when he became president. He can voice his opinions no matter how hateful or hated many of us may find them, but he shouldn't cross the line between conveying his personal opinion and threatening to exercise his official power to punish certain ideas or speakers. I believe he has crossed that line in some situations, such as withdrawing

White House press passes from reporters and threatening to withdraw broadcast licenses from a TV network for what he viewed as unfair coverage. When he attacks the media as “the enemy of the people,” that has a chilling effect on freedom of the press. (I don't mean to compare Trump to Hitler in any other sense, but it is noteworthy that Hitler sowed distrust among the German populace by using the term *Lügenpresse*—or “lying press.”) It's no coincidence that the press is often called the fourth branch of government: It's meant to provide a check and balance against overreaching government officials. Trump should not be punished for this rhetoric, but the rest of us have to push back hard and point out its insidious, anti-democratic dangers.

Every administration in my adult lifetime has taken some actions that have violated free speech and the press. The Obama administration, for example, pursued a record number of prosecutions against whistleblowers under the Espionage Act, which goes back to the red scare of the World War I era. What's different about Trump is that he openly brags about his attacks on the press. Richard Nixon pulled many of the same levers, but he did it on the sly. We found out about it only afterward, right? Trump seems proud of his attacks on critics.

Regardless of who is in the White House, every one of us has an opportunity and a responsibility to understand the essential nature of freedom of speech—to appreciate the distinction between supporting what somebody says and supporting their right to say it. You have to train yourself to look beyond the particular message to the underlying principle, and to be alert to the slippery slope of censorship.

Speech is not an unalloyed good. We don't defend it because it can't do harm; we defend it because the harm of censorship is greater than the harm of speech—and because the harm of speech can be prevented, or at least reduced, through *more* speech in the form of education and discussion, both of which are more effective than censorship.

Freedom of speech is also a means of exploration, of engagement with other individuals and the world at large. If we can't express ourselves, that stunts our ability to realize our highest individual potential. The Constitution starts with the words *We the People*. We the people hold the sovereign power in this country. As the Supreme Court declared back in 1964, “speech concerning public affairs is more than self-expression; it is the essence of self-government.”

Without this freedom, no other rights can be pursued.





average
acceptance
now



**Notes of a web-
slaying comedian
and *Black Lady*
Sketch Show cast
member who's
fed up with the
insane demands of
capitalism, showbiz
and social media**

BY **QUINTA BRUNSON**

In 2016 I went to the Shorty Awards, a show that honors greatness in internet culture, at which you can be nominated for top comedy performance of the year along with a dog that went viral for having a tongue that hangs out all the time. It's humbling.

Anyhoo, I took a picture on the green carpet of an awards show I didn't necessarily want to be at. In all honesty, I was embarrassed. I dreamt of the Emmys, the Golden Globes—even the ESPYs, where I would present an award and offer comic relief next to LeBron James. An internet awards show felt beneath me.

I posted the green-carpet selfie on Instagram. For the most part the comments were kind and complimentary, filled with “yes girl!” and “slay gorgeous.” But there was one that has stuck with me for four years.

“Eh, she's so average looking.”

Average. I don't know if the person who wrote that comment meant to insult me but.... I take it back; I'm pretty sure that was 100 percent their intention. My first thought was no thought. The comment just kind of had me staring at it and trying to understand how I felt, whether to care and if I should say something back. I didn't, but I did care. At that point in my career I wanted to be outstandingly good at my job and to be considered pretty at least. I thought what probably everyone has thought, including the person who left the comment: In order to be worth something in this world, you have to be above average.

One definition of average is “the usual or ordinary standard, level or quantity.” If anything, average sounds, dare I say, *comfortable*? Constantly fighting to be more than average or even less than average seems exhausting, like entering yourself in a race you can't win while committing to being sweaty and out of breath for the rest of your life. When I had this epiphany, years later, I knew I needed to reevaluate my place in the endless race—and to ask myself why I wanted to run it in the first place.

I needed to take a stand: Average Acceptance Now.

Like most of us, I was taught to aim for the stars. In school we were told, “Look at George Washington Carver. He fucking invented peanut butter. You should strive to be just as amazing.” And look, I get it. I really do. But I wish I'd also learned something like “Look at Ms. Johnson, your computer teacher. She loves her job and has a nice house and a cool family.”

For me, a little girl who grew up on the west side of Philly, right at the intersection of the rich kids from UPenn and my friends who robbed the rich kids from UPenn, more realistic portrayals of a good life might have helped. While I think George Washington Carver was absolutely a fucking G, I wish I could have been impressed by my own father, a man who went to work and took care of his family every day. (Also, I wish I had noticed the boys at school instead of worshiping Omarion

from B2K and actually thinking I had a shot with him.)

Dear capitalism: Your insistence on obscene wealth is partly to blame. Bernie and Warren talk about the vanishing middle class, which is great, but what about America's *average* class? After all, their electorate includes countless Americans who are not extraordinary *or* basic. The *We're the Millers* of the world. Pleasantly average.

Mainstream media, you're guilty too: You've promoted unhealthy and unattainable standards of beauty that have disturbed the psyches of all genders in America. You tell us that anything less than physical perfection is shameful—unless we have some weird quirk that can be marketed as “strong” or “brave” instead. But I'm not going to give you another lashing for your part in the war on the average. You get it every day, and you don't care. No, instead I'm going to focus on an issue closer to my heart.

The regular black girl can barely exist and be praised for it the way “everyday beautiful” starlets like Saoirse Ronan, Emma Stone and Brie Larson are. Don't get me wrong, I think these women are beautiful, but I don't see the same attention lavished on your everyday beautiful black girl actress or singer. If you happen to look like the average black girl, you're subject to scrutiny over whether or not you're attractive, the ways in which you look like an animal or a man and why women like you should be liked based on your talent, not your looks. Social media and the inflated currency of likes and shares are also to blame. We're all caught in the dirty cycle.

So I'm going to help break that cycle. I started here: Over the New Year's weekend, I went to Big Bear, California with some friends. I was so excited about heading to a cabin with people who have known me for years and always loved me for who I am. But on the way there, zig-zagging through majestic mountains, I received a text. I was invited to a New Year's party thrown by a celebrity back in Los Angeles. Part of me wanted to somehow race back to the city and show



In school we were told, “Look at George Washington Carver. He **fucking invented peanut butter.**”



face at this party—to take bomb pictures and really flex on the 'gram. To be among the above average and prove I was one of them.

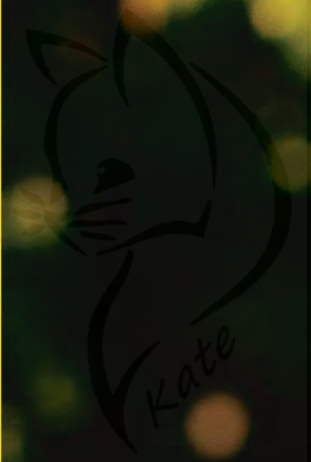
Not this time. Why would I want to go to a party where I would be forced to evaluate my status every other second, hovering over the snacks table and agonizing, *Am I famous too? Just a little bit? Like goofy-friend-in-1980s-sitcom famous at least?*

So I responded, “Thank you so much for the invite. I got my own things going on. All the best in the new year.”

I chose my life.

I shut my phone off, looked around the car and almost shed one single G tear from the overabundance of peace I felt. I had left the race and decided to sit at the finish line. Because it turns out the finish line isn't at the end of the race at all; it's wherever people love your average-ass self.

Oh, and the anonymous user who left that mean comment on my Shorty Awards pic? Reader, I went to that person's page. They looked exactly like me. I hope I've embodied their every word.











PLAYBOY ADVISOR

Ian Kerner brings his expertise as a Ph.D., LMFT, psychotherapist and author of the best-selling *She Comes First* to tackle a range of sexual dilemmas, from STI fears to sexting etiquette.

First up: advice on an underreported problem plaguing the sex lives of almost one in three men

Q: *I'm a 33-year-old straight man, and my problem goes all the way back to when I lost my virginity at 14. I'm sure I wasn't the only high school freshman who climaxed the second a girl touched his dick, but premature ejaculation has hounded me ever since. I've had three long-term girlfriends, and with each of them I've gradually been able to last longer than 30 seconds—but even then my entire sexual ride consists of worrying the big O is coming too fast. After my last relationship ended, I got on the apps for a while but promptly gave up; the embarrassment was too much. It didn't seem to matter whether I'd been drinking or not, whether it was morning, day or night or whether I was mildly or extremely attracted to the woman. At this point I'm ready to ditch sex altogether and stick to masturbating; at least then no one else will know how quick it's over. What's wrong with me?—M.R., Lexington, Kentucky*

A: Above all, know that you're not alone. Premature ejaculation, or PE, affects at least 30 percent of men. In my clinical experience, guys with PE are no different from guys who don't have it in terms of masturbation style, porn use, family background, sexual history or mental health, meaning PE is something you were likely born with. But that doesn't take away from the embarrassment you feel. Here are a few suggestions (including one you can try as soon as you finish this article) that will help you have longer and less-fraught sexual experiences.

The first is a masturbation exercise. Edging, also known as the male multiple-orgasm technique, can bridge the gap between masturbation and intercourse. The idea is to identify your point of

ejaculatory inevitability—that first contraction of an orgasm—and interrupt it before you go over the edge. When you feel an orgasm coming on, stop! This releases blood from the penis, which in turn cycles the process back a bit, giving you a longer pre-orgasm interval. Try doing this with the help of some new, extra-hot porn. By approximating the intensity of a one-on-one sexual encounter, you're more likely to be ready for your next partner.

When you're with that next partner, shift the emphasis away from your penis. Even without PE, there's a big orgasm gap between men and women due to factors such as their arousal times, and there's no way a man with untreated PE can get a woman all the way there. Become an expert at oral sex and manual stimulation. Incorporate sex toys. Use your words. Create fantasies. Do whatever you can either to make your partner orgasm first or to get her right to the edge so you can climax together. (Another tip: Numbing sprays like Promescent can delay orgasm by desensitizing the penis. They're not a total solution but worth a shot.)

The next line of intervention is an SSRI, a common class of anti-anxiety medication with the side effect of delayed ejaculation. It might make sense to talk to your doctor about a low dose, particularly if your anxiety and depression around PE are intense. It's not a panacea, but it can be part of the solution—and there should be no stigma attached to SSRI use.

Dealing with PE is complicated, and managing it takes real effort. The good news is that with a little work you'll likely see a big payoff. So don't give up till you've experimented with multiple approaches. And when you're back in the game, remem-

ber that lasting longer doesn't mean your partner will inevitably go straight to pleasure town. Instead of thinking about how long you last, ask yourself, How do I become an arousal-generating person?

Q: *I'm an 18-year-old straight woman who has been seeing the same guy for months—but I've never finished when we have sex. When we use toys I become self-conscious and can't climax even though I use the same things when I'm by myself. At this point I feel pressure to achieve orgasm just because it's been so long. How can I overcome my stage fright?—J.A., Arlington, Virginia*

A: Orgasms between partners can be inconsistent or even nonexistent in ways that aren't true of self-stimulation. What do you think it is about sex with your boyfriend that makes it so difficult? Could it be a lack of clitoral stimulation? Not enough foreplay? Something about the environment that makes it difficult to relax? Certainly worrying about your orgasm doesn't help, as any form of anxiety during sex is a major arousal inhibitor.

If you're not already talking about this with your boyfriend, you should be. He should know that orgasm doesn't have to be the destination during sex; there are lots of other parts of the journey, and you should be getting the most out of them. I would also ask you to think about the parts of sex you really enjoy. Is it the kissing, the touching, maybe giving him pleasure? For the time being, see if you can create a sex menu that doesn't include orgasm but allows you to enjoy other dishes that may be just as delicious.

I would also encourage you to add some psychological stimulation. By this I mean fantasizing together, watching couples

Instead of thinking about how long you last, ask yourself, How do I become an arousal-generating person?

porn, listening to an erotic podcast. The brain is our most powerful sex organ, and it has the ability to turn us on and off. Right now the anxiety is turning you off, so I want you to fill your head with stimulation that turns you on.

Q: *I'm an 18-year-old male who's never had sex because I'm afraid of getting an STI. How can I get over my fear?*—W.R., Lafayette, Indiana

A: Fear is the key word here. It's impossible to have totally safe sex, but you *can* consistently have safer sex—and a little bit of that fear of yours, balanced with your passion and enthusiasm, can make you a great lover.

With an appropriate amount of fear, you'll be motivated to always use a condom when having intercourse. A little fear can also inspire you to avoid making sexual decisions while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, which of course can lead to reckless choices. And your fear will, I hope, inspire you to read up on STIs. I recommend Columbia University's Go Ask Alice website and that of the American Sexual Health Association.

If you've ever had oral sex you should get tested just to know you have a clean slate. If you haven't gotten an HPV vaccine yet, you can do both at the same time. Some STIs are symptomless; when you've been tested yourself it's easier to ask a potential partner if they've been tested. If you're serious about someone and think you may want to see them again, you can start with less-risky behaviors, such as kissing and manual stimulation of the genitals, and wait until your partner has been tested to move to riskier behaviors such as oral sex and intercourse. There's nothing wrong with taking the slow route: It allows more time for passion to percolate. Believe it or not, safe sex can be hot sex.

Q: *My boyfriend has a lower libido than I do. I want him to pursue me—I rarely enjoy being the aggressor—but he's happy to have sex once a week or less. How do*

we reconcile our differences?—G.P., Newark, New Jersey

A: Low desire is common in both women and men, but sometimes men have to live with the pressure of feeling they should be walking hard-ons. It's also possible your boyfriend experiences anxiety around the discrepancy in your libidos.

All of which is totally natural. Maybe you're able to have what's known as "spontaneous desire," in that you can experience a sexual cue and get turned on quickly, and maybe your boyfriend has "responsive desire," meaning he has to build on sexual cues to experience desire. Desire isn't the first thing he experiences; it occurs once he's somewhat aroused. If that's the case, you may have to change how you think about sex. Your spontaneous desire may have to be the kindling to get him fired up, and his sense of passion or aggression or whatever it is that you crave may have to come a bit later.

See if you can create erotic sparks outside the bedroom and decouple those sparks from any pressure or invitation to have sex. If you usually have sex on the weekend, make a rule that Monday through Friday is an erotic-spark zone where you can engage in small bursts of sexual and erotic connection without feeling they have to lead to sex. Whatever you do, remember that desire, like the stock market, goes up and down and that countless variables can affect libido: stress, mood, lifestyle, health, medications, body image—you name it. Go easy on yourself and your boyfriend as you seek that sweet spot.

Q: *I recently got out of a toxic relationship that was on and off for about three years. For the first time in what feels like forever I'm happy and at peace. That said, I'm finding it hard to put myself out there again. This is made extremely difficult by how horny I am! Considering sex is pretty much all I think about now, do you have any tips on how a straight woman in her early 20s can get back to dating—and banging?*—H.G., Los Angeles, California

A: Congratulations on getting out of an unhealthy relationship. Now you can focus on living a healthy life—which, yes, includes sex. Of course a difficult relationship will chip away at your self-esteem, and getting back into the swing of sex and relationships can be nerve-racking. So give yourself some time to get the lay of the land.

I hear that you're horny, but what kind of sex are you looking to have? Some fun, no-strings-attached sex, something more relational or something in between, like a friend with benefits? I think it's important to get in touch with your sexual self before rushing into the actual deed. Start noticing who and what turns you on, what makes you feel sexy and alive.

From there, let the world know you're seeking and that you spent too much time with your gaze focused on the relationship. Connect with people who make you feel good about yourself, and know that you're in charge. You can go out on a date, you can flirt, you can fool around—and you can say no at any point. The sexual brain has two systems that operate at once: a sexual excitation system and a sexual inhibition system. It's called the dual-control system, and my colleague Emily Nagoski, author of the terrific book *Come As You Are*, compares it to a car: Your sexual accelerator needs to rev up, but you also have a brake you can step on at any time. So get out there and take a joyride.

And because you're so horny, I hope you're masturbating. The past three years have been a golden age in vibrator design, so start giving yourself the pleasure you crave and deserve.

Q: *I'm a bi woman in her early 20s. My 35-year-old partner of six years told me in an argument that we don't have sex anymore because he's no longer attracted to me since I gained weight. He has apologized several times and tells me how beautiful I am daily, but I have a hard time believing him. We've started having sex again, but it's awkward. I don't want him*



to see my body, and he's afraid he'll somehow hurt my (admittedly sensitive) feelings again. This makes our sex passive and cautious. How do we work through it?—E.W., Camden, New Jersey

A: People say shitty things to each other when they argue and tend to focus on faults. It's great that he apologized, but I understand you still feel hurt by his comments: Sexual self-esteem can be hard to hold on to. The reality is that we all age, our bodies change, our weight goes up and down, and somehow we have to keep navigating a world that celebrates youth, thinness and unrealistic ideals of perfection.

I know he's repeatedly told you he's sorry and thinks you're beautiful, but have you been able to have a conversation that goes beyond apologies and reassurances? Have you been able to say that you want to believe him and move on but that part of you feels hurt and rejected, or part of you is scared he might not be attracted to you anymore? Maybe you need more opportunities to come to him with your vulnerability—and he needs more opportunities to be empathetic and soothing.

Also, try having a few good experiences of real-world sex together and put this behind you. You've been together for six years, so try adding new elements

that will bring out some excitement and passion in both of you and get you to that aroused place where you can't keep your hands off each other.

Bottom line: You had an argument, and you need to repair. And when you have an argument that touches on sex, sometimes the repair is in the sex itself.

Q: *I've been with my boyfriend for a year now, and for about half that time we've been in a long-distance relationship. I'm very forward and sexual, but he saves his affection for when we're in the bedroom—or, in our case, when we're in the same town. I think sexting is an important part of any relationship, long distance or not, but he won't get onboard. It's truly frustrating. My argument is that since he's never done anything like that, he shouldn't reject it just because he feels uncomfortable. How do I make him feel more at ease in the sexting realm?—T.C., Buffalo, New York*

A: How cool that you're so open to keeping things sexy and alive when you're apart. I think you're totally on the right track, and there's so much you can do—from sexting to Skype sex to remote-controlled sex toys—to stimulate each other long distance. But those options may take you to

deeper waters; in that case, he has to start by dipping his toes in the shallow end.

I like that you're able to "mentalize" what he might be experiencing: mainly lack of comfort and experience. Have you tried having a conversation with him in which you appeal to these vulnerabilities—something like "Hey, I know sexting may be out of your comfort zone, and I'm sorry if I'm pressuring you. It's just that I'm really into you and it's hard to be apart. And when you shut me down, it makes me feel rejected." In that statement, you're trying to do a few things: You're giving yourself a way to open up the conversation and acknowledge his vulnerabilities while expressing yours. He may get defensive at first, but don't let him escalate. Just keep coming back to the vulnerability.

Ideally, getting off the main floor of life, as I like to say, and going down to the basement, where all those vulnerable emotions are safely stored, will set the stage for experimentation and sexual connection. Finally, whether you envision sexting as words, photos or both, you can start the process by sending him simple questions to which he can respond yes or no, such as "I'm having a sexy daydream about doing [fill in the blank] when I get my hands/mouth on you. Is that something you'd like?" 



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**PLAYBOY
INTERVIEW:**

JAMEELA JAMIL

A candid conversation with the activist, Good Place star and social-media firebrand on figuring out when to take up space and when to stand aside

Every once in a while, somewhere amid the shouting, social media can offer glimpses behind the Vaseline-smeared lenses of the entertainment industry. The stars and their feeds suggest a vast gulf between our regular lives and those whose accounts we follow, like and mimic. Actress, writer, DJ and activist Jameela Jamil is hyper aware of the dynamics at play and how they directly affect the lives of vulnerable people offline; indeed, she has taken it upon herself to protect those people. No one asked her to do this, and some don't believe she should. Jamil considers it a duty nonetheless. She views acting and hosting as her work—and work she's grateful for—but activism is her calling. She also thinks of it as just one of the many ways traumatized people try to tell the truth.

Jamil was born in London in 1986. Her

parents were raised Muslim but didn't run a religious household. They were conservative, however, and their insistence that Jamil play the role of helper in the family, coupled with a condition that rendered her mostly deaf from birth to the age of 12, left the young girl consumed by her own silence. In her 20s she worked in British radio and TV, developed an eating disorder, made a lot of money, spent a lot of money, gave away a lot of money, endured public abuse while coping with the private abuse she'd suffered as a child, had a nervous breakdown amid battles with depression, anxiety and PTSD, and discovered a lump in her breast. The lump, and the cancer kite floating above it, ready to crash-land into the human life below, changed everything. At 28 she booked a one-way ticket to Los Angeles.

Soon Jamil learned the lump wasn't

cancer, but that didn't mean she was going back to London. The move to Hollywood led to a meeting with agents, who sent her out to audition for a role in what was then referred to only as a new half-hour comedy from producer Michael Schur (*The Office*, *Parks & Recreation*). Despite having no acting experience to speak of, Jamil earned the part of Tahani Al-Jamil on what we now know as the NBC comedy series *The Good Place*, which signed off this year after four critically acclaimed seasons.

Over the series' first three seasons, between talk-show appearances and panel discussions with the cast, Jamil quickly became a media darling. In interviews she was as funny as she was direct in her support of progressive politics and thought. On social media she called out influencers and other



"To stay on this earth—I'm going to do it, and I'm going to make it an adventure and figure out who the fuck I actually am."



"I would be so rich if I had put my principles aside and worked with the beauty and weight-loss-product companies."



"Tahani couldn't be further from who I am. She's very driven by what other people think of her, whereas I couldn't give a flying fuck."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN PFLUGER

celebrities for posting personalized ads for weight-loss products, especially when those ads were highly visible to impressionable children; she even successfully pushed Instagram to block minors from seeing posts about dieting and cosmetic surgery. She responded to tabloid-journalism comments on celebrities' weight with the hashtag #iweigh, encouraging herself and her followers to measure their worth in experiences, beliefs and identities instead of body mass or lack thereof. She has addressed the United Nations and spoken out about anti-abortion legislation. She supports numerous charities for at-risk young people and advocates for individuals with disabilities and those suffering from mental-health issues.

She has also annoyed a lot of people. By her own admission, those people haven't always been wrong. For the past year or so there has been an interesting tension between those who believe Jameela Jamil is trying to help, those who believe Jameela Jamil is part of the problem and those who fall somewhere in between. Case in point: On February 4 (shortly before this issue went to press), HBO announced Jamil as one of the judges for its upcoming competitive voguing series, prompting Twitter backlash from members of the house-ball community who questioned whether the star deserves a spot on a show about an LGBTQ subculture. The following day Jamil defended her role on the show while at the same time coming out publicly as queer in a tweet, though she soon admitted it had been "the *most* inappropriate and unfortunate time" to come out. As of press time she was still committed to the show; Jamil is not one to let the naysayers tell her what to do.

Shortly before *The Good Place* aired its series finale, PLAYBOY sent writer **Ashley C. Ford** to Los Angeles to chat with Jamil, who was also stepping in as a guest editor of the magazine. Ford reports: "Jameela insisted we eat before we talked and suggested Erewhon Market near the Grove

shopping mall. When I arrived at the upscale food store, I found she was wearing the same cactus-print pajamas I'd seen her wear in countless Instagram posts. She would later wear the ensemble to a party thrown by Beyoncé.

"On the drive to her home, tucked away in the Hollywood Hills, I wondered if Jamil was just another rich, beautiful woman one would expect to 'get away' with sporting sleepwear at the grocery store—and an A-list megastar's party. As we discussed her



work, her beliefs and her personae, it became clear that she is far too complicated to be defined by such a lazy assessment.

"Her voice, melodic and posh, serves the image of a popular TV actress. But she exhibits none of the obvious insecurities or overcompensations of Tahani. She's graceful until she isn't, and when she isn't, it's not a pratfall; it's flat on her face. Whether she was or wasn't what I expected didn't matter to her at all. Despite being friendly with each other online for months, and being in conversation together at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan, this was our first opportunity to sit and talk one-on-one. The

day before the interview she found herself battling Twitter commenters after posting that she didn't regret having an abortion. And of course, social-media standoffs are a natural place to start any conversation with Jamil."

PLAYBOY: Talk to me about this abortion tweet.

JAMIL: My Twitter feed is a hot mess of people telling me they love my fetus. I'm like, No, you don't. You don't know me, you fucking creep. People can't handle that I wasn't in an emergency. I wasn't a 12-year-old; I wasn't a rape victim or an incest victim. I was just 26 and mentally unwell. Condom broke, morning-after pill didn't work. Got failed twice in one day by contraception and then didn't want to be pregnant because I was mentally unwell—I have a chronic illness. I wasn't in the mood for 19 years of fear and responsibility—and 10 months of my body and my mind and my hormones changing, and all the pain and discomfort that comes with a pregnancy I wasn't ready for. And I wasn't in the right relationship. It was just all wrong, so I protected myself. And I'd do it again.

PLAYBOY: Why do you think that can be hard for people to hear?

JAMIL: Because they don't respect women's rights. Also, I think it

has a lot to do with how you grew up. Mothers are seen predominantly in the role of nurturer, and there's nothing wrong with that. That's great. Being a housewife and a mother is an incredibly noble role in the world. But you then look at all women only as that. It's like if you watch a lot of porn, after a while you start to look at all women as something that's going to suck or fuck.

PLAYBOY: You're guest editing this issue of PLAYBOY. Do you read it for the articles?

JAMIL: I always assumed it was a joke when people said PLAYBOY's journalism was really amazing. It's only now that I look back and realize how many incredible interviews have appeared in the



magazine. There have also been some wonderful-looking women in **PLAYBOY**, and I really enjoy the female form. But once I grew up and started to understand patriarchy and objectification, and not wanting to contribute to that, I stopped involving myself with the publication. Then I went through a kind of heavy period of not wanting to see any kind of female sexuality or nudity. I turned fully the other way and started to become angry about female nudity, which I'm thankful I no longer stand by.

PLAYBOY: What made you angry about it?

JAMIL: I was abused when I was younger, but the thing that really impacted me around female sexuality was being raped when I was 22. That caused a sudden change in the way I felt around female sexuality and objectification, and I started to almost feel angry with the women who were empowering but objectifying themselves. I was mad at them because I felt they were contributing to the culture that made men look at me as nothing more than a sexual object. That was because I didn't understand the concept of patriarchy. I didn't understand the system, and I didn't understand that it's not our fault. There was some part of me that blamed myself, and I blamed women, and it just poured out of me, which was my response to trauma. I hadn't had any therapy; I didn't think I needed it. I felt mad at women, which is so ridiculous, because that's not the right target. It's a whole system of oppression.

PLAYBOY: Don't you think a lot of women have had that response?

JAMIL: Yes, but I didn't understand that until now. Having been someone who was quite slut-shamey when I was younger, a decade ago, I now understand that thought process. Some people come from a religious background. I grew up in quite a reserved family, with parents who had been raised Muslim, and even though they were no longer practicing, they still held a lot of the values. Sex was a taboo subject in my household. That contributes to our judgment around it, but there can also sometimes be a rage toward those we feel are complicit in the culture.

I do stand by one issue I have with the way women are objectified in our media, even when they objectify themselves. When Madonna did it, it felt like a fucking party, like everyone was fucking everyone. It didn't feel as though

one person was performing for another but that we were all in on the show. Now there's more of a culture where the woman is in underwear and doing all the dancing, and the man is wearing outdoor winter layers and sitting on a chair. You can't even gauge the temperature in the room—who has the thyroid problem? That annoys me, because why should we do all the work? And I genuinely think that attitude permeates our culture.

PLAYBOY: How do you stop doing all the work?

JAMIL: In bed, sexually? I just stopped. One day, in my 20s, I decided to stop. There was a specific moment when I was kissing a boyfriend, and I just stopped him and said, "I don't like kissing like this. This isn't how I like to be kissed." I'd never said that before. In five years of kissing, I'd never told people—almost

*I was this It girl,
and everything
was so charmed,
but I was
dying inside.*

all of whom had kissed me badly—that I wasn't interested in their style of kissing. Having the freedom to say, "I would prefer to be kissed like this," felt like the beginning of my sexual autonomy.

PLAYBOY: How did the guy you were kissing react to your honesty?

JAMIL: Absolutely stunned. Aghast. But that was followed by the kiss I'd asked for. Then we had great kisses for another year.

PLAYBOY: You had your first kiss at the age of 21. Did you feel ready for it?

JAMIL: It was very weird for me to willfully engage in something I'd always felt was something that was done to me. That was really hard, even at 21, and it wasn't the only reason I didn't get kissed; I also had a tremendously unsexy personality, which has never gone away. I've got big boobies, so that makes up for it. But no, I don't think I've ever been ready for it. The smartest thing I did was wait until it was

someone I chose and trusted, and I knew he cared about me and already loved me before I kissed him. It was the most exceptional first kiss a human being could have. I swear to God, I fucking heard Nat King Cole play; fireworks went off—all the shit you see in the movies. I kissed a grown man who knew what he was doing, and he did everything at my pace. It was another six months before I lost my virginity. But I was with someone who was caring, who knew what happened to me when I was younger and just wanted to look after me.

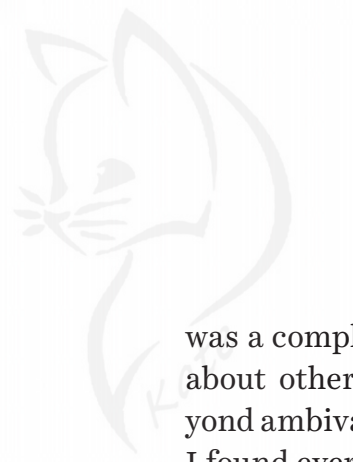
PLAYBOY: Where did this reclamation of yours come from?

JAMIL: I had started to realize I was having sex like in the movies. I was having sex like porn. I was emulating. I wasn't in touch with myself and therefore wasn't really enjoying anything of a sexual nature. I was just acting like I was there to please the other person and make them feel good about what they were doing, which I think is a pretty common theme among women, especially since the takeoff of online porn. We think that as long as they've had a good time then we've had a good time. I'm not speaking for all women, but a lot of women I know go through that, especially when we're young. We think the goal is to entertain and be reviewed highly among the guy's friends.

After my nervous breakdown I felt I had the right to say anything because I'd gone through this sort of rebirth. For a lot of people, depression is just repressed rage and a repression of yourself. On the outside, it looked like I had a perfect life; I was this It girl and this party DJ, and everything was so charmed, but I was dying inside. I made a deal with myself that the only way I was willing to stay on this earth was if I told the complete truth. I'd been mentally ill and suicidal since I was a child. I tried twice in my life to kill myself: when I was younger, and again at 26. So I was like, This is the last thing you're going to try—just tell the complete truth all the time.

PLAYBOY: What does it feel like to have a breakdown?

JAMIL: I'm English, so I'm not a highly emotional person externally. But my breakdown came in the form of inaction. I didn't identify that I had depression, because I wasn't crying all the time; I wasn't lying down eating ice cream under a blanket. It was a complete lack of emotion. It



was a complete lack of care about myself, about other people, about anything. Beyond ambivalence, it was just a numbness. I found everything overwhelming. Brushing my teeth at night was overwhelming—so many cavities. I found booking a flight to just be too much. Everything felt like I was being torn into pieces—not even in a painful way but in a way that just continued to make me feel more and more separated from the world. It's like whatever George Clooney feels in the film *Gravity* when he lets go and just floats off. That's what my breakdown felt like, that I wasn't attached to anything or anyone.

That's what makes suicide such an appealing option in that moment, so I desperately beg for people considering it to hang on. Often those most suicidal moments happen because of a particularly bad day, or sometimes it's a particularly bad 10 minutes. I beg of you to stay and sleep on it and try to find help; try to do something you've never done before to see if you can reactivate yourself, and try telling the whole truth all the time. It explains why I'm now this maniac who has so much to lose but still risks it all. Because this is the deal I made with myself to put up with this shit, to stay on this earth. I'm going to do it, and I'm going to make it an adventure and figure out who the fuck I actually am.

It's only now, in my 30s, that I'm starting to work that out, and I'm lucky I'm with a man who wants to know more and more about who I actually am. It's the moments when I don't know he's looking at me that he finds most enjoyable, when he's investigating who I am as a person. Even when we fight, he's the first boyfriend I've ever had who encourages me to fight back. He never curtails my rage or my voice.

PLAYBOY: We're talking of course about your longtime boyfriend, singer-songwriter James Blake. How did the two of you meet?

JAMIL: We met because we were both radio DJs at the BBC, and we became fast friends. I was moving to Los Angeles, and he told me he was also moving there. That was a fucking lie. He was like, "No way. Me too." The lyrics of his song "I'll Come Too" are explicitly about us getting to know each other, almost like a diary entry. Because for a minute I was like, "Oh, I might actually go to New York," and he was like, "Oh yeah, I might also go to New York." He's just a hot, talented stalker.

PLAYBOY: How has James changed your perspective on sex?

JAMIL: I consider our sex life something sacred. What I will say is it's fantastic, and he makes me feel safe in every single way as a person. My whole life, I was missing someone who would just make me feel safe. If you're an abuse victim, the number one thing that can unlock your truest sexuality and humanity is just someone who makes you feel that way. That's the time when you can most engage with who you really are and what you really want. That's the thing he does every single day. I realize that whenever he's not in the house, there's a part of me that doesn't even recognize that I don't feel safe until he walks back in again, and it's like a light switches back on.

The worst thing Taylor Swift ever did was not fuck up, and people hate her for that.

Before him, I'd always felt that being needed was a burden. Now I'm okay with him needing me, and I'm okay with needing him. I was a very lonely child. I was deaf until I was 12. I lived in silence for a lot of my life. I didn't have friends when I was younger, and I'm not super close with all of my family. I was very good at not needing anyone and being self-sufficient. I was almost smug about that—I thought I was Neo in *The Matrix*. I don't know what the fuck I was doing, and it made me unhealthy and weird. I'd never felt family until him, so it's nice to be accountable and responsible for someone else. I used to consider it a triggering burden, but with him I'm just all too happy to do it, and vice versa.

PLAYBOY: Why did it feel like a burden?

JAMIL: I lost myself in other people. I still have a tendency to do that, but I was conditioned very young to be of service to other people and was explicitly told it was the point of my existence, so it makes complete sense that I would end up being an

activist. I've been an activist since I was 19. I come from a lineage of very mentally ill people, and I was the sole caretaker of all of them since I was 12. I've wanted to help people because I feel I don't have a choice. It's beyond a calling; it's a duty.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of activism, you're passionate about climate change. How do you feel about Trump trying to take on Greta Thunberg via Twitter?

JAMIL: I don't understand his stance on climate change at all. We couldn't have more evidence of how much humans are destroying the planet. All I know is that if he really didn't think it was real, he wouldn't be threatened by a child speaking out on it. His actions indicate fear; otherwise he would just ignore her. Greta is one of the most important people of

our time, and we are so lucky that this unspeakably brave young person is dedicating her life to waking up the world. Greed is what is blinding these powerful politicians who value money over the well-being of our planet. Part of that comes from the fact that they're all so old and they know they won't be here by the time the worst of the damage is done.

PLAYBOY: How will you get involved with the upcoming U.S. election as a noncitizen?

JAMIL: I will just be encouraging people to vote. I will be encouraging people to educate themselves on policy. I believe marginalized people and young people are de-

liberately not encouraged to be politically engaged because they're the ones with the power to turn things around in their best interests. That needs to change. They need to step into their power and fight together to create a safer world to grow up in.

PLAYBOY: Do you miss London?

JAMIL: I miss aspects of London, but London is in such a strange place right now politically. In Los Angeles you kind of exist in this weird little bubble, this super progressive area where there's so much love and so many gay people and multiracial couples. It just feels safe here. Whereas in London, the discomfort is everywhere, like the fact that Muslim girls get acid thrown in their faces on the street there. I love my people, and I'm supporting them in the ways that I can, encouraging them to vote and take control of their lives.

But in my line of work, London is still behind in racial diversity. We're still



behind in giving women important jobs that lead to long-standing, dignified careers. The rest of us either get pushed out or get pushed into being nothing more than sex objects, whether we want that or not. Whereas I remember coming to America five years ago and seeing Robin Roberts hosting *Good Morning America* and knowing that Oprah is a really big deal here. Oprah would never have made it in the U.K. I couldn't believe I was seeing women in their 50s and 60s of different races on the biggest shows on U.S. television. That was a big moment, realizing if I wanted to continue in this industry, I would have to come here, because otherwise I'd be sent to the glue factory.

PLAYBOY: How did you make the choice to move to L.A.?

JAMIL: I'd always loved Los Angeles because I grew up obsessed with films. I worked in a video store for four years. I'd always planned on coming here at some point, just to live even for a couple of months, but I never did because I fell into that trap of listening to the fearmongers when you're a woman in this industry. You're told someone else is going to take your spot and you can never be unavailable. I didn't take a single holiday for six years, because I was scared. Especially when you're brown in such a white male industry—which the television industry is in England—you feel lucky to be in any room.

When I was 28, I had a lump in my breast, and I had to wait a week for test results to find out if it was cancer or not. So I made a fuck-it list, and number one on that list was to move to California with no further plans. I found out it wasn't cancerous, but I had to have an operation. You're not allowed to fly until six weeks after the operation, so I booked my one-way ticket then: no plans, no visa, no money. I'd spent most of my money on charity and had also just generally mismanaged my finances because I was mentally ill and didn't have a business manager. I was a

fucking idiot when I was younger. Still a fucking idiot now sometimes.

PLAYBOY: What has it been like having your real life equated with that of your *Good Place* character, Tahani Al-Jamil?

JAMIL: So fucking annoying. It triggers me really badly and upsets me. Obviously there are similarities—we have the same hair and makeup style because I did my own makeup on the show; I'd rather sleep than sit in the makeup chair for an hour and 45 minutes. I'm also English and



a person with privilege who is trying to work within philanthropy. And I'm attention-seeking because you have to be in order to bring attention to a big subject that needs to be addressed and has been willfully ignored. So I understand where some of the similarities come from, but people think *The Good Place* is a fucking documentary. I'm trapped by that. It's the criticism most leveled at me, which I find very reductive and irritating. Say what you want about my ignorance, but don't compare me to a fictitious character who couldn't be further from who I am. She's very driven by what other people think of her, whereas I couldn't give a flying fuck.

PLAYBOY: How do you behave on set?

JAMIL: I'm chatty and inappropriate and I snack a lot because there's a lot of waiting around. I had very bad gas during season one of *The Good Place* because American snacks are no joke. Why do you put corn syrup in everything? My director's assistant didn't know what had hit me. The fear of farting on Kristen Bell was worse than the fear of acting badly. She's so small, she's nearer my asshole than I am, so it'll hit her first and worst.

It weirdly got me through my fear of acting opposite her since I'd never acted professionally before *The Good Place*.

PLAYBOY: Do you have dream roles? Do you want to play a superhero?

JAMIL: I want to do the things I've never seen South Asians do. But I don't want to be a superhero, because I hate running. I pulled out of a giant action movie last year because I didn't want to run. I have no business being in an action role—I know my limits. There's another Asian out there I'm making space for, and she can come in and do that. She can run. There was this scene in *The Good Place* of a big fight, and Janet kicks everyone's ass. Everyone was featured in the fight sequence, but the producers decided that I would hide behind the pool table and watch everyone else fight.

It took five days to shoot the fucking scene, and I pulled a muscle in my ass because I was sitting there for so long. I left being the only member of the cast who sustained an injury during the sequence, and I was the only one who didn't fight. I was actually inactive for so long that I got injured.

PLAYBOY: You presented Taylor Swift with her *Billboard* Women in Music Award in December. How does it feel knowing she looks to you for inspiration?

JAMIL: I find it wild when anyone has heard my words. I met Taylor Swift 10 years ago when she was trying to break into England, and she's been nothing but incredibly supportive. The worst thing Taylor Swift ever did was not fuck up, and people hate



her for that. There's something so unreliable about a child star who doesn't end up on heroin or piss into a mop bucket. It's like, Who the fuck are you to come up with manners and grace? When I was standing there listening to her speak and watching the way she was to me and everyone else, I was perplexed by her reputation. I couldn't marry it to the woman in front of me at all. **PLAYBOY:** How does it feel after you decide to share on social media?

JAMIL: It's a wonderful release. I'm so far away from humanity, but I feel I'm inching closer and closer every time I tell the truth. It started in micro truths, my version of microaggressions. Things like getting the wrong order at a coffee shop and saying, "I'm sorry, this is actually the wrong order. May I please have the thing I wanted?" It started in restaurants and coffee shops, where I advise all people to start. Then I would slowly gear up the courage to tell more and more different kinds of people they were doing something that did not fit with what I wanted. But it started with coffee orders.

I haven't really had a bad reaction to telling people I want more. If anything, I've had a great reaction, to the point where I've realized why women have been told not to ask: Because when you ask, sometimes you actually get what you've asked for, and they didn't want us to know that. They told us never to ask, because you're likely to fucking get it. For the past two years James has been amazing at pushing me to ask for more money. I walked away from a big show I really wanted. Three times I said no to the offers, even though I was scared they were going to tell me, "Fine, we'll go find someone else." But I did it. I stuck to my guns, and then I got the money I wanted and got equal pay with all the men I would be working with.

PLAYBOY: Has this ever cost you professionally?

JAMIL: Yes. I've spoken out against toxic people at the top and gone to HR and then shortly after lost a job I was up for within the same company. I've cost myself millions of dollars. I'm doing okay financially right now, but I would be so rich if I had put my principles aside and worked with the beauty and weight-loss-product companies that have wanted me to endorse them for a decade. I would own six houses. I own zero houses because of my stupid fucking principles.

I don't want to be part of the poison

that poisoned me when I was younger and made me crazy. So I've very much bitten the hand that feeds me. I've made enemies everywhere because I tell the truth. I'm a whistle-blower, which is just a fancy term for tattletale. I think it's genuinely why I've never been sexually harassed in this business. I've been sexually harassed outside it, but in this business it's been very clear from the outset that I don't have a filter.

PLAYBOY: Many of your tweets create polarizing reactions, and sometimes you'll admit that you shouldn't have weighed in on a topic. How do you come to that conclusion?

JAMIL: I don't nail it all the time. I've taken and eaten a lot of Ls—so many

I own zero houses because of my stupid fucking principles.

embarrassing mistakes. I've fucked up, but I promise to be better and more aware. In November there was a controversy between me and the rapper CupcakKe when she said she'd been on a monthlong water fast and showed gorgeous photographs of herself after this fast. I didn't research her. What asshole in my position doesn't research who I'm talking about, especially when that woman is marginalized? A stressed-out chaotic moron, that's who. I was mortified that I didn't know this was someone who was suicidal, mentally ill. I thought I was saying it with love, but I didn't know who I was talking to. And that happens all the time. I'm changing strategy for this next decade to be more careful, more of a grown-up, to accept that there's a lot to catch up with. And now it's so on me.

PLAYBOY: A lot of people online, especially influencers, do share those weight-loss products with their audiences. I'm talking about Kim Kardashian.

JAMIL: Never heard of her.

PLAYBOY: Or Kylie Jenner.

JAMIL: Never heard of her.

PLAYBOY: Seriously, I'm wondering how you feel about being in an industry with people who do things you find not just wrong but personally offensive.

JAMIL: Heinous. I feel sullied by it, and that's why I rage so hard against it as my emotional version of a carbon footprint. I'm trying to level out the fact that I am participating in this. I've been an activist for 14 years, and I was never able to change laws and policies until I was in this industry—until I was in the belly of the beast. Even when people don't like the things I talk about, they're fucking talking about them. I start big global conversations. I rage hard against it to try to undo all the toxicity. This industry was responsible for so much of my self-hatred when I was younger. I know the exact impact of the behavior of everyone in this industry, behavior they engage in because they're driven by corporate greed.

I can't believe the things I didn't know. When I was 26 and a radio DJ, I got super fat-shamed for months on magazine covers—pictures of my thighs, ass, bare buttocks. They'd get a photograph of me picking up my house keys outside my front door at seven A.M., and that photo has lived on and on and on. Paparazzi would stalk me outside my house and call me a fat cunt, trying to provoke a reaction from me. People would roll down their car window and scream at me that they hate me now that I'm fat. It was insane, and my Twitter was a mess.

But that's when I realized how we treat fat women. At that point, I hadn't been fat in years, and I'd never been fat and famous. I've been skinny and famous because I had a serious eating disorder. To see how disgustingly we dehumanize and berate and abuse fat women, even when you're on the radio—that made me realize I had to kick up the fight against fat phobia. That's when my activism became stronger, and I started speaking in Parliament and doing all these things. There are speeches on the internet that I made eight years ago.

PLAYBOY: I've watched some of those.

JAMIL: It's so frustrating when people think I took this up after *The Good Place*. There are receipts all over the fucking internet that I've been saying this for years. I've been a fucking broken record for 10 years. After I gained all the weight, I was flooded with endorsement offers from weight-loss programs,



saying, “We want to take you out on the beach and get humiliating photographs of you with your stomach out, eating a burger, running. We want you as unflattering as possible. Then we’re going to chart your weight-loss success and sell a DVD and a diet off the back of it.” When we see those pictures of celebrities at the beach followed by three months of speedy progress, they’re being paid to do that, and they’re being paid for the humiliating photographs we see in the *National Enquirer* and *Daily Mail*. It’s a marketing tactic.

PLAYBOY: You’ve said you don’t want to talk about body positivity anymore. Why is that?

JAMIL: First of all, body positivity is a sociopolitical movement that’s not for me, right? I’m a straight-size woman, and that movement was created out of pure vital necessity, because women have to love something that society hates so much and for which they’re medically discriminated against. My polycystic ovary syndrome was missed because I was chubby, and my friends have had endometriosis misdiagnosed because they were chubby. We get fat-shamed by our own doctors. You don’t get jobs; you don’t get to date as much. You don’t get treated with basic human fucking dignity and respect out in the streets. Body positivity is a response to extreme measures of hatred and discrimination. A straight-size person taking space in that movement is hugely unethical. And as someone who was obsessed with my figure for decades, body positivity is still me thinking about my body. I’m still locked in the cage. Whether I love it or hate it, I don’t want to think about it. My boyfriend isn’t thinking about his body; he’s getting shit done.

But because my body’s been such a priority, I can’t love and love and love something, especially not something society has programmed me to hate, which is reinforced every time I open my phone. There is either subliminal or very aggressive messaging built to tell me that there’s something wrong with me, that I’m old and fat and wrong and ugly, so I can’t love this. Body positivity for me is too fucking hard, and a lot of people feel that way regardless of their size. I fucking love the idea that we ought to stand in front of a mirror and love ourselves. I hope I get there, but I’m nowhere near that yet. I still have severe body

dysmorphia, so I’d rather not engage. I’m into body neutrality: This is just my car that I get in to go around.

So I’ve made more money, I’ve gotten more things done, I’ve become a better friend, I’ve become a better lover. I am a better person for disengaging from my obsession. For too many women, it is an obsession. So if it’s your obsession, I suggest, at least as a first step before body positivity, don’t try to get all the way to love. Just get to acceptance and then love. There’s pressure to love ourselves no matter what, in spite of all this hatred, and I get it, but it’s fucking hard for some of us.

PLAYBOY: How do you respond to people who think I Weigh is a body-positivity movement?

I’m just a very curious cat— except I’ve never tried booze, coke or bum sex.

JAMIL: People think it’s a body-positive movement because the press keeps willfully describing it as that, no matter how many times I’ve said it’s not. I actually request beforehand in all interviews, “Please don’t announce me as this. Please don’t talk about it as this. It’s a mental-health movement; it’s not a body-positive movement.” But they place me in it because we have a habit of placing thin women in the body-positive movement. We want to have the conversation, but we don’t want to show a picture of a fat woman on a magazine cover. I’ve tried to get fat women on covers with me, and men told me, “Then you can’t have the cover.” So my principle says, “Okay, then fuck you.” But if I don’t do it, no one has that conversation, because the next actress on that cover sure as shit isn’t going to talk about it. They’re going to stay in their fucking lane.

So then I end up taking space. If not me, then who? It’s this frustrating situation we see a lot with poverty, where

someone with privilege talks about the injustice, and we tell them to shut the fuck up. If we don’t listen to the poor, and we also won’t listen to the privileged, then who gets to speak?

PLAYBOY: As the message spreads and grows, how will you convey that it belongs not just to this one representative but to myriad people?

JAMIL: Not everyone’s going to get this immediately. I look like the fucking enemy. I’m slim. All of a sudden I’m conventionally attractive, even though until now South Asians were a big no-no. But brown is suddenly in. I’ve suddenly entered into privilege in that area—the “pretty privilege” or whatever the fuck they call it—after years of being called

a monkey and a curry-smelling Paki on Twitter when I was on television. But I know my end goal and my intentions. I have to just let them distrust me and dislike me and keep going, because we all have the same end goal. We can’t fucking nitpick each other over it all the time.

What I’m now building, what I’ve spent all my money on in the past year, is hiring women to help me tell the stories of other people so they can tell their own stories in their own dignified ways. We’re launching a platform of storytelling, be it via video or written word or podcasts. I needed to get loud and take up

space to get this much power and privilege so that I now have the power to create space for other people. But you have to let someone get up there first so they can open the fucking door.

PLAYBOY: What else is on the horizon?

JAMIL: I’m launching my own company, which is terrifying. I’ve never been a CEO before, but with I Weigh I’m having to learn business, learn the ins and outs of the incredibly litigious American system, learn about changing laws and bills and policies. I just want to know how badly I can fuck this up. Like when I speak openly about abortion, I want to know what’s going to happen if I just tell the whole truth. My dad always used to say, “Look, they’re not going to take you out in the street and shoot you.” So I’ve always had that as an absurd limit: “Well, as long as I’m not going to be literally shot....” I’m just a very curious cat—except that I’ve never tried booze, coke or bum sex. For those, I’m okay never finding out.









CROSSING TRACKS

FICTION BY
ARIEL DORFMAN

As usual, over breakfast, he told her about what he had dreamt the night before, not the whole dream, just the leftover scraps and remnants and clinging ivy, nothing special that morning, a dream like any other, like so many others. He had found himself on a train and it had started to leave that city, slowly at first, like trains do in reality, and then he had looked through the window and she was on the platform, she was not onboard, she was there looking with amazement at the train but not seeing him because he was in the menacing gray dark inside and she was in the sunlit station, not really full of sun but one of those cathedral stations covered with glass that lets the rays of daytime filter and dapple through, not seeing him but already knowing he was gone, already sad that he had left without her, even if it was not his fault in the dream, he had supposed she had clambered on at the last minute or was waiting for him in the next wagon, he had not supposed for a second that she would be stranded on the platform. And there was nothing he could do, no way to stop the train, no emergency brake, no passengers to help him or inspector to approach, no way to communicate with her—just when you needed a cell phone they haven't been invented yet in your dreams, he joked to cover the anguish and asked her to hand him the butter for the toast—there was nothing to be done at all as her image disappeared from view, getting smaller and smaller, nothing to be done but let the train hurtle to wherever it was threatening to take him, far from her, nothing to be done but wake up, and that is what he had done. The best solution because she was gloriously asleep next to him, and he let the loving beat of her heart diminish the drumming in his, and he rolled over and held on to her like a raft in the sea and closed his eyes and slumbered off till dawn came, and then breakfast, and the mere telling of the dream would dissipate it, this time it would also be swallowed like a piece of cotton with some drops of blood flushed down the toilet, that would be the end of it, there would be no look of amazement and abandonment on her face in the falsely luminous station and he would not be stuck on a train without her, they would be together as always and nothing could separate them, not ever, not anything.

That's the way it had always been with their nightmares. You articulated everything bad, brought it out into the open so it could fade and dissipate and ultimately vanish.

Not this time.

The next morning, over breakfast again, it was her turn to tell him what she had dreamt.

"I don't quite know how to put this," she said, genuinely puzzled. She poured the coffee, made sure her husband's cream was slightly warm just like he liked it, placed the fresh fruit in front of him in a blue porcelain bowl. She had been up way before he had awoken, which was not typical of her, but that was not the only strange thing about the morning. "I was there," she said, finally.

"I was there, at the station when the train left with you onboard."

"You were there?"

"In the station you dreamt of the other night, at least the situation was the same, a glass-covered station, the train suddenly moving, and I saw someone just like you through the window, looking out toward me, but it was just a glimpse and then the train that had started slow picked up speed and you were gone. Except that my dream didn't start with me on the platform, left behind. It started somewhere else, a hotel next to the sea, it felt like France somehow, though nobody was speaking French, and we had to catch the train and your bag was dragging along, folds flapping on the floor, a sort of carry-on, but you hadn't packed it well or closed it right or something like that. So I took the bag—by now we were in the waiting room outside the platform—and I fixed it, made sure it was zippered and upright, and when I stood up, you weren't there. I went out and looked for you up and down the platform and that's when the train departed."

"I didn't know you weren't onboard."

"Of course you didn't, darling. But I was desperate to catch the next train and there was nobody to ask for help, just like you in your dream, I was alone and you were alone, and then I saw a train about to leave and I got on."

"With the bag?"

"The bag had disappeared. It was the bag's fault, this mess, so maybe I decided to punish it in the dream and get rid of it, but what I did clutch was my handbag, you know, the sleek black one you bought me for my birthday, so elegant, much too expensive, but you know how I love it, I was holding on to it for dear life. For dear life, yes, but not mine—yours, as if your life depended on it."

"Oh, poor thing, darling, I'm so sorry."

"It gets worse. The train was full, though the only people I can remember were some women, they seemed like...servants, I guess, maids, refugees, women who clean houses and don't have papers, and they didn't seem to know whatever language I was speaking, but they told me that the train was not going to New York—"

"Wait, wait, didn't you say you were in France?"

"Well, the train you were on was heading for New York and that's where I had to find you, except the one I had jumped on so hastily was advancing at a hundred miles per hour in the opposite direction. I found a conductor and told him I had to get off, he said it wasn't possible, the next stop was an hour away, but I told him that I would jump off if he didn't stop the train, and he relented, 'We'll take care of you, madame,' he said—in French! 'You can join your husband in Paris very soon.' Because by then you weren't going to New York anymore, your train was headed for Paris. And then we pulled up to a small rural station and I got off and just as the train was leaving, a man stepped down



from the train. He was very deliberate and meticulous in his movements, but there was something messy about him, something sprawling, and also kind of helpless, but it was all a sham, that he was vulnerable and trustworthy, because he came up to me and grabbed my handbag. I didn't let him, I fought him off. There was nobody in the station and the train had already left and it was really in the middle of nowhere, but I knew that I had to keep that handbag with me and that it contained the name of the hotel where we had stayed the night before and I needed to get there—if I couldn't catch your train, there was no other way for us to find each other. But there was something else in the handbag that mattered. I wasn't sure what it was, but once the man melted away, he was gone from one instant to the other, once I was no longer in peril, I looked inside the handbag and there was a photograph."

"A photograph?"

"Of another man. I can't describe his features, what he looked like, I didn't recognize him, had never seen him before, but this much was certain: He was going to kill you. That man was on your train, both of you heading for New York, or maybe by then it was Paris, and if I didn't warn you, he would do it, he would murder you."

"Murder me? What had I done? Aren't you the one who's always—"

"Yes, yes, that's what was strange about it—even in the dream I thought, My, this is really bizarre. I'm the one who's been threatened, I'm the one who wakes up with chills because someone is—"

"And this wasn't like any of the men who in your dreams...?"

"I'd never seen him before."

"So not a clue?"

"Hold on, yes. He only had one eye—not an eye patch on the bad one, just a sort of hollow and then his other eye was glinting in the photo, a ray of black light reflecting back at the photographer like a razor blade. Horrible."

She stopped now, took a sip of her coffee, found it cold, placed it in the microwave even though she hated to heat coffee in the microwave. Though not as much as she hated plastic.

"And then?"

"And then, nothing. I woke up and you were sleeping so soundly, even chuckling to yourself—"

"I was dreaming my mother was alive and she had made me a beef stew and that was funny because she's the one who turned me into a vegetarian."

"And turned me into one as well, bless her soul," she said. "But what matters is that you were having a sweet time, obviously, in your dream, and it didn't seem right to wake you up to tell you that some one-eyed man wanted to kill you, so I slipped out of bed and made you this extra special and super nice breakfast."

"Thanks," he said. "It was great to spend some time with Mom and have a good laugh with her. Sorry that my dream the other night should have upset you so much that you ended up inside it, but the good news is that I am alive and well and enjoying the fruit and the fresh eggs, and that tonight we'll both have a good night's sleep and all these silly trains and platforms and criminals will be gone."

But that's not how it turned out.

He dreamt that night he was back on the train and desperate to find her, to get back to where she was. But they had made no plans for this separation, they had not done what they always did—thanks to her, she constantly anticipated that something could go wrong (there's always a first time, love), and there-

fore had an elaborate code of behavior, it was necessary to go back to the last place they had been together and she stipulated how long each of them should wait and she specified such and such a corner in each city. Here, she would say, if we ever get lost, love, you will come back exactly here and wait for at least an hour. Though in the dream they had not made any arrangements. He did not know in the dream that they had been at that hotel near the seaside in France, he did not even know in what country they were or that the train was heading for New York, at least in her dream it was heading for New York, or maybe it was Paris, in his it was just rushing into the darkness, because it was night. He felt unbearably useless. There was no way to contact her, and even stopping at the next station and getting off would not help because she would never think of finding him except on the train she had last seen him board, and he had no idea what the station she was stranded at was called. He was cut off from her and from the world and did not know what to do. Whenever he was in trouble in his daily life, at least for their 40 years of marriage, she had been there to give him advice and protect him, he had been there to defend her if she was in need, and now, and now. But there was one piece of information that had seeped through from his wife's dream, one item that swam into his mind like a coffin floating on a lake, her story had affected his in one particular way: He knew that on this train there was a man who had been paid to kill him. In the dream he did not know that his wife knew this and that she knew who it was, had seen the man's photograph, nor that he had one eye and the other was a hollow. But he did know that if he did not find his wife before the man found him, he would be dead, he would never see her alive again.

"And then I woke up."

She said nothing for a while, toyed with the rye bread that he had toasted that morning, toasted it to just the right temperature and with just the right amount of butter and orange preserves and served on the special blue plates that they both loved so much.

"So, do you think this is going to go on?" she asked. "I mean, night after night?"

He didn't know, he couldn't tell, all he could think of was to stay up all night while she slept, be vigilant, and if he saw that she was having a nightmare, he would wake her up and if she was still stranded in that station or on another train or headed to New York or who knows where, if she could remember the identity of the murderer, well then, he would make suggestions, he would tell her what to do, who to contact, where to go, how to find him, offer a phone number she could use in the dream, he'd think of something depending on what she told him and where she was, and then, when she went back to sleep, maybe something deep inside her would have listened and she could end this craziness, they could join their two dreams and make it one.

She shook her head and said it was an absurd plan and that dreams were mysterious things, so it might be better not to interfere, let whatever was working under the surface of their minds take over and work itself out, trust that each of them would find a way to save the other. He answered that she spent her life interfering with other people's plans and what they bought and consumed and threw away, all that stuff that was bad for them and for the ocean and the air supply, she wanted to change people's dreams, right, for their own good, so what was wrong with his doing it to her for her own good? As for the plan being absurd, granted, but what they were living was ab-



surd, after all, and demanded drastic solutions, she was always saying that people had to take control of their lives. Well then, she said, if he insisted, why not let her stay awake and he should sleep so she could help him, she had always been the practical one and in real life the only one with a job that put her even remotely in peril, though the truth was that the plastics industry probably saw her—if they even noticed her at all—more like a bothersome mosquito than somebody to really be reckoned with, so she at least knew how to deal with potential assassins and thugs, at least in theory. He countered with an irrefutable argument: She was the one who had seen the photo in her dreams, not him, she could identify the killer, and if he slept that night then the one-eyed man might murder him before she could arrive on the scene.

She nodded reluctantly. It made some sort of insane sense.

“And anyway, it’s my turn to dream, right?” she said.

And her smile was enough to reassure him that nothing could happen to anyone with a wife who could smile like that, with those lips and that mouth and the promise they offered and the promise they kept that very night.

It was all he could do to fight the drowsiness, force himself not to drift along with her into the languid aftermath of their lovemaking, that reconciliation with the world that comes when two bodies have forgotten the word *two* and even the word *body*, have forgotten any and all words, he made himself remember the word *train* and the word *danger* and the words *photo* and *killer* and *loneliness*, enough words hammering in his brain to keep him awake and attentive.

Once her breathing became regular and peaceful and he was sure that she had indeed dozed off and was not trying to fool

him as she often did, trick him into falling asleep because she had beat him to it, he switched on the lamp next to his bed, adjusted it to the softest position possible. Insufficient light to read—he didn’t want to get distracted—but if a nightmare came he would catch it, he would nip it in the bud.

It came, the nightmare, the change in the rhythm of her sleep, the fluttering of her eyelids, the tossing and turning. He waited a bit more, wanted her to settle into it, bring back some information that might be useful, and only when a small cry of distress scratched out of her lovely mouth did he relent and shake her, once, twice.

“What? What is it?”

“You were having a nightmare. Where were you? Back on the train?”

She could barely keep her eyes open, but they were not happy, those eyes of hers, they seemed to resent being disturbed like this.

“No, no, I have to go back.”

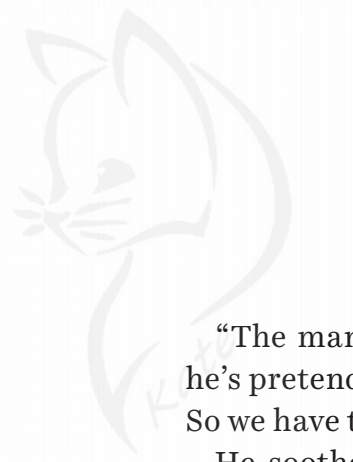
“What happened?”

She propped herself up on an elbow, looked at him as if he were a ghost. “Ah, it’s you,” she said. “So glad it’s you and that you’re—but no need, no need to worry, love. I’m on a fast train, an express train, I’ll get to our destination before you can, just let me go back to sleep and I’ll take care of everything.”

“All right, all right, great.”

She plowed her head into the pillow and fell asleep immediately and then abruptly lifted herself up, looked him straight in the eyes. “There’s something you should know. That man is on my train.”

“What man? The man in the photo?”



“The man who wanted to steal my handbag. He’s disguised, he’s pretending to be someone else, but I’d know him anywhere. So we have to be careful, right? We have to be very careful.”

He soothed her, yes, they’d be extra careful, she should go back to sleep and in the morning everything would be fine.

He watched her sleep.

There was a lot of dreaming that long night but no more nightmares, no cries, no sign that she was anguished, maybe she had reached his train and had managed to board it and they were next to each other facing one man and maybe the other man as well, vanquishing death and solitude, hand in hand forever.

No such luck.

“You shouldn’t have woken me up,” she said. “I told you it was best not to interfere, didn’t I? I didn’t go back to that dream, love, so I’m still on that express train I told you about when you woke me and stopped me from overtaking you, I’m still there hoping to await you at a station that you haven’t arrived at yet so I can climb onboard when your train arrives, that was what my unconscious cooked up to get us out of this mess, and it was working out, but you interrupted it, you silly. So let’s stop this nonsense and let the dreams take care of themselves and take care of us, and either tonight in your dream or tomorrow in mine, we’ll figure it all out, what do you say?”

He couldn’t argue with her. His plan, after all, had failed.

That night, he asked her if she had any more information she could give him, to help his own unconscious mind meet hers.

“Just make sure that at every station you look out for me.”

“But what if you’re not there? I mean, I interrupted your trip on your train, you said it yourself, you’re still back there and may never catch up.”

“In your dreams, you don’t know that. You need to tell yourself that your wife will find a way, she’ll reach you somehow. I’ve always done it, haven’t I? No reason why this time should be an exception.”

He sighed. “See you in my dreams, then.”

“See me in your dreams. You must be dead tired.”

Before he knew what had hit him, he was back on the train, roaming up and down it, searching for his enemy, the man who wanted to kill him. Over and over, he would see the back of a head and say that’s him, that must be the one-eyed man in the photo he had not seen but knew existed. And his hand would tap on the shoulder and the person would turn around and there was no face where a face should be. Just a flat oval paste, flesh the color of sour cream gone bad, no mouth, no nostrils, no eyes, not even one, not even a hollow, only yellowing skin peeling like burnt plastic and then the train would lurch to one side and he would continue on to the next passenger and again, the same terror, the same faceless face.

Until he came to the last wagon. There was only one man in it, his head tilted forward as if he were sleeping or dead. But he was not sleeping, he was not dead. Only the back of him, his dirty hair and neck could be seen, but he was not like the others, there was something different about this man, there was something more substantial and treacherous.

The man stood up and turned. His movements were deliberate and meticulous and yet somehow messy, sprawling. He seemed helpless, vulnerable, and yet in his hand there was a knife, it had sprung out of nowhere, just like the man himself.

Wait, wait.

Wasn’t that man supposed to be on the other train?

How had he gotten here?

Maybe his wife was also onboard. Maybe she was looking for him.

But no, he could see her—it was not clear how he could do this from the moving train, but he could see her ahead on the platform at the next station, the station that was coming up. She was waving her arms, as if signaling the train to stop, in a few more minutes she would climb into this very compartment, he would soon have her in his arms, she had made it, she had found a way to reach him, save him.

Without warning a second man joined the first one, a man with a broken bottle in his hand.

It was the man in the photo, the photo he had not seen. There could be no mistake, that hollow where an eye should be and the other one flickering like a stagnant pond: the man she said wanted to kill him.

Except she was wrong.

I’m not the target, he said to himself. They’re not interested in me. I’m just the bait. She’s the one. She’s the one they want so badly to ambush. How else to get her onto that train but to make her believe that the love of her life was threatened? How else to trap her?

Wasn’t that why he had left her behind at the station so long ago, so many nights and dreams ago? So that she wouldn’t come with him on this trip where death was lying in wait?

But she had followed him into his dreams and soon would be on this train, she was waving her arms on the platform, feeling triumphant, feeling immortal, and there was no way he could warn her. He had managed to eliminate her from his trip on this train the first time and the second time, but now she was going to correct his dream, get herself killed out of love for him.

He didn’t hesitate.

He rushed the men, began to brawl with them, grabbed one by the arm, the other by the neck. He felt something in his ribs, a crack, a blow, a knife, he felt something like ooze or blood, something gushing, but he ignored it, he didn’t let go of the first man with his deliberate and meticulous hands or the second man with his one eye glinting like a sick moon, dragged them toward the back of the wagon, began howling at them, howled at himself for having told her his dream over breakfast and forced her to come and rescue him, howled into space and time and eternity in the hope that she would hear him and run.

This pain, this pain in his side, it was what they wanted to do to her, it gave him strength, and he kept on moving to the back of the train, it didn’t seem to be slowing down as it reached the station, and he caught a glimpse of her, smiling and exultant on the platform, but he willed the train to continue its frenzied escape into the night, he held on to the arm of the one man and the neck of the other and managed to kick open the door and it swung wildly and the tracks were there receding and advancing under them, the three struggling men, the tracks flashing with the eyes of a madman.

In his mind he anticipated how the bottle gashed into his wife’s eye, deep into her face, that’s what they were preparing for her. If she came onboard, one would grab her as if she were a handbag and the other would plunge the edge of the bottle into her face, down and down and around and then a knife would follow the same path, that’s what they were planning.

With one last effort, he hurled himself onto the tracks, he hurled himself and the two killers onto the crisscross of deadly, disappearing tracks.

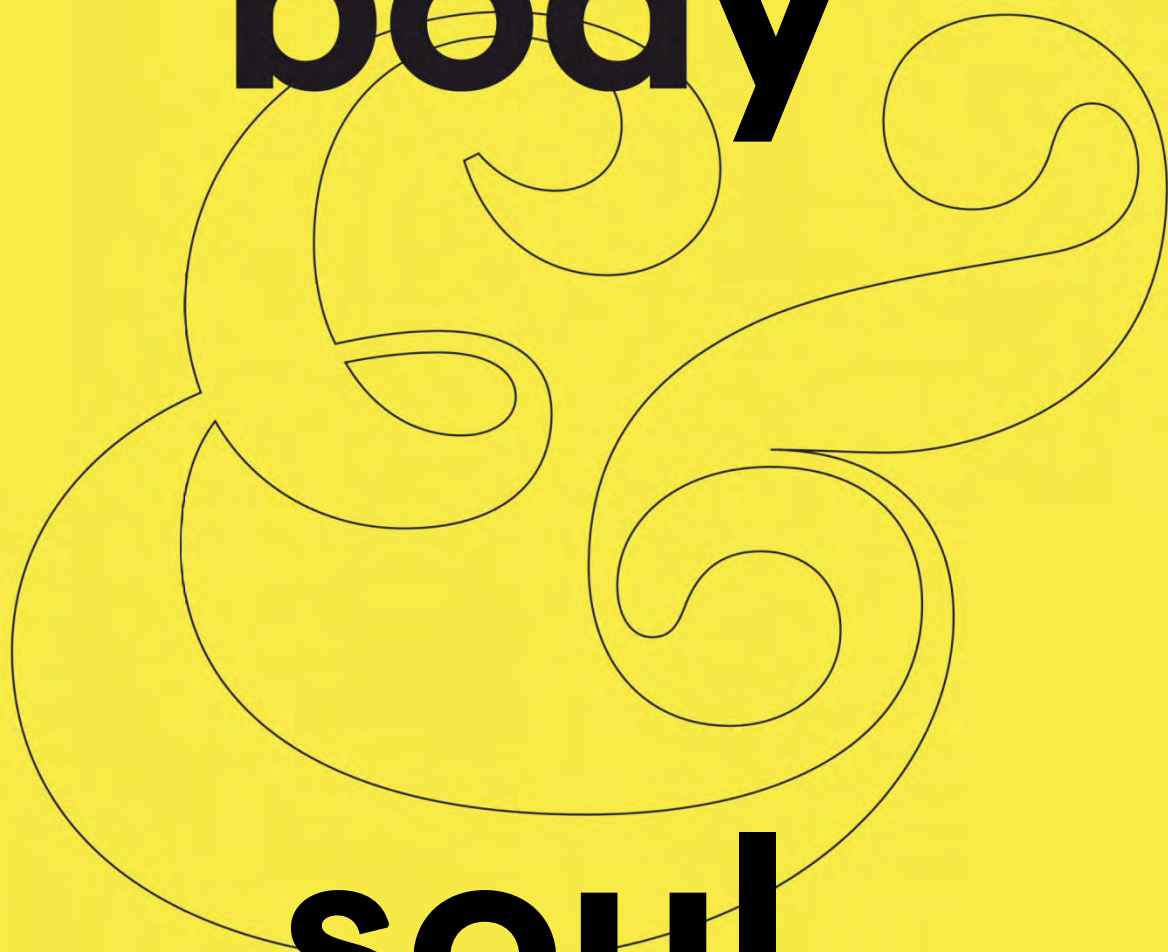
He was falling and as he fell he could only pray that she would be there the next day, the love of his life would be there, alive and by his side and smiling, he could only pray she would be there when he woke up, if he woke up, if he woke up, that is. 



"I'm sorry, but sometimes my process becomes unwieldy."



body



soul

With a full slate of 2020 projects, multimedia artist **Nick Cave** reaffirms his dedication to fostering community, speaking truth to power and celebrating our wondrous, vulnerable bodies

BY **OSMAN CAN YEREBAKAN**





Opening page, above and opposite: The mixed media centerpiece of Cave's solo exhibit *Until*, opening at the Momentary in July, includes millions of plastic pony beads, 16,000 wind spinners, 24 chandeliers, 17 cast-iron lawn jockeys, 13 gilded pigs, more than 10 miles of crystals and one ceramic crocodile.

On a foggy Chicago morning I find myself sweating atop an elliptical in a hotel gym, preparing my questions for Nick Cave. I push and pull the machine's handles as fast as works from Cave's vast repertoire march through my mind. His impossibly intricate *Soundsuits* sculptures dance in full ecstasy, their fringes twirling; the dance party he organized around a mammoth rotating streamer curtain for *The Let Go*, an immersive exhibition that debuted at New York's Park Avenue Armory, reappears in epic radiance.

My visit to the gym before our meeting stems from an urge to project deftness—intellectually and physically—in front of a man whose art has allured, provoked and moved the public for nearly three decades.

At first sight, Cave, 61, radiates controlled dynamism through his sculpted physique and magnetic eye contact. Standing beside him in a room populated with items he has gathered to create new *Soundsuits*—the first in years, he says—I notice a pile of colorful sweaters on an ironing board. Two male mannequins are stationed by a cassette player Cave still uses to switch between tunes according to his mood. He wears an all-black ensemble of sports jersey and skirt, finished with chunky high-top sneakers. We proceed to wander through Facility, a multipurpose studio, gallery and private space he shares with his personal and professional partner, graphic designer Bob Faust, and their dog, Bam Bam.

Cave's biggest upcoming project is a restaging of his solo

exhibition *Until* at the Momentary, a satellite of Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Arkansas, in July. (This follows its debut at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts in the fall of 2016 and adaptations in Sydney and Glasgow.) The show, whose title is an allusion to the legal principle of "innocent until proven guilty," is one of the artist's most direct responses to the country's current ills—in particular its gun policies and racial profiling by law enforcement. Ingrained in Cave's flamboyant visual lexicon is piercing commentary on the urgency of taking a stand, as well as the irreversibility of harm.

He recalls his initial reaction when he heard about Freddie Gray's death in 2015. "I am an artist with civic responsibility, so how do I use the voice I am fortunate to have?" he remembers thinking. Furious, he wondered if racism exists in heaven, a rumination that served as catalyst for *Until*'s installation of acrylic pieces blended with domestic icons of Americana and consumption.

Until consists of a tent stitched out of shoelaces next to acrylic and glass ornaments suspended from the ceiling—a colorful rain of pony beads, dream catchers and drop-shaped decorative pieces the artist collected from shops around the country. Immersing the audience in a kaleidoscopic forest, the arrangement is studded with such alarming details as bullets embedded in wind spinners. From above hangs a mammoth crystal cloud made of 14 layers of materials, including crocheted blankets on the cloud's bottom, hiding beneath its surface like a sea of colors and serving as a reminder of safety. On the outside, lawn jockeys poke their heads among an array of gramophones, porcelain birds and metal lamps.

"The vulnerability is always exposed within the work, one way or the other," says Cave, who spent more than four weeks hand-embellishing the cloud's outer surface for its initial hang at MASS MoCA. Ladders allow the audience to face, up close, details both horrific and mundane. *Hy-Dyve*, an immersive video projection Cave created as part of *Until*, fills a room with images of water rushing beneath viewers' feet while avian and human eyes stare from above the flow. The artist's signature use of movement and gesture through the body echoes in the room-enveloping projection—a hallucinatory commentary on the slave trade and contemporary policing, on American racism then and now.

Bound by *Until*'s sheer physicality, the clashing motifs raise a question: What is this focus on the body that runs so viscerally through Cave's work? The installations darkly beckon, and the *Soundsuits* noisily dance—but where are they leading us?

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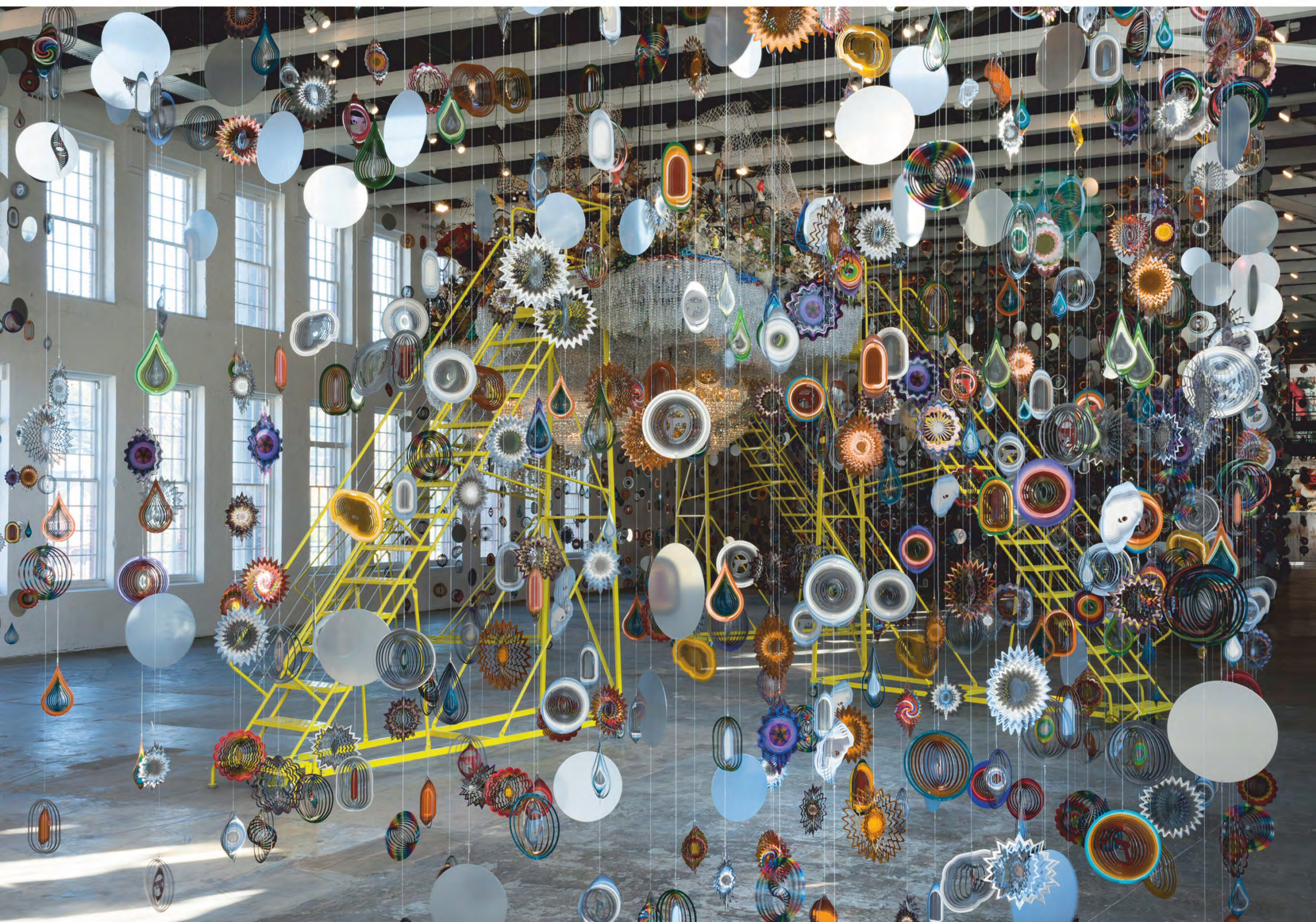
Sea Sick, a piece from his 2014 Made by Whites for Whites exhibition that pairs a racist tchotchke with an architectural composition of seascape paintings, now sits in Cave's living room, where he also displays paintings by contemporary American artists Barkley L. Hendricks and Titus Kaphar. One floor down, six assistants weave beads and sew threads, adjacent to a gallery where Cave and Faust rotate works by established artists such as Jeffrey Gibson and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, as well as works by emerging names and thrift-store finds that spark their interest.

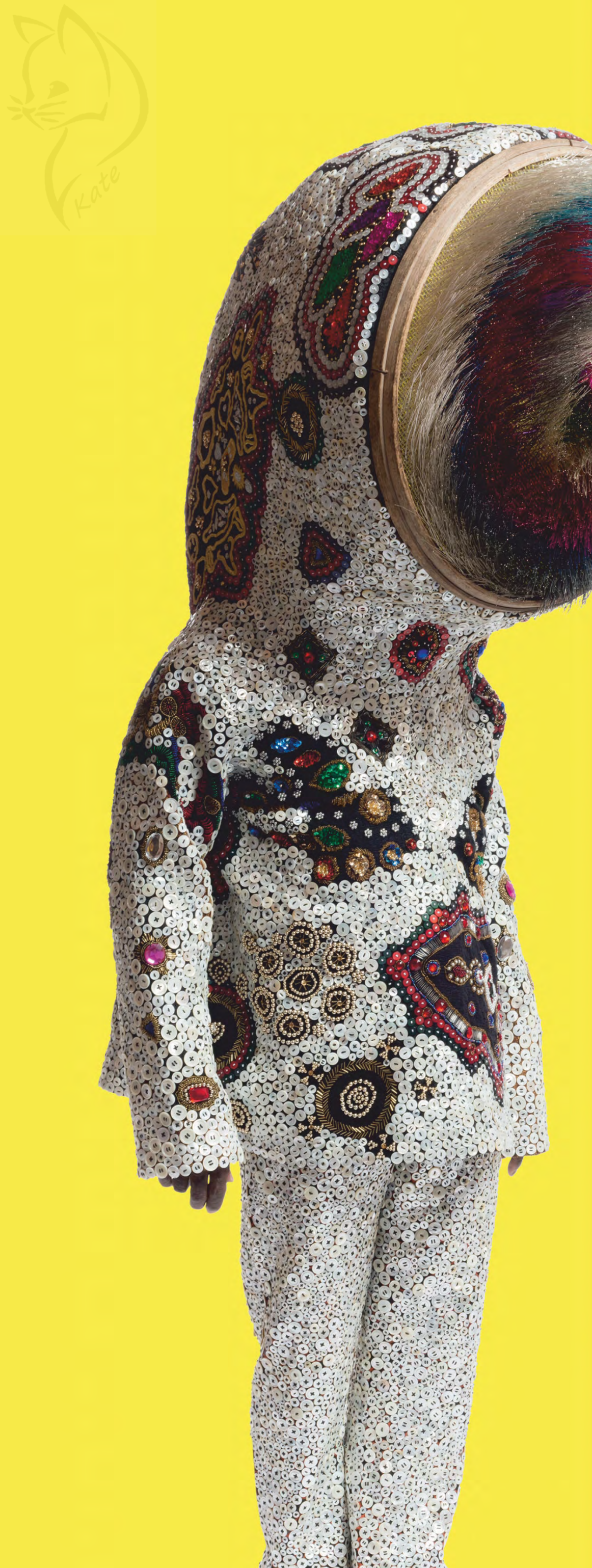
"Nick is a collector at his core, both through sourcing materials for his works and also in his incredibly impressive art collection," says Jack Shainman, who has been showing Cave at his eponymous New York gallery for nearly 15 years. "His dedication to supporting young and emerging artists spans Nick's creative practice, from burgeoning artists, musicians and dancers in his performance pieces to the founding mission behind Facility."

Among his peers, Cave is unique in combining art and other disciplines on a grand scale, weaving together fashion, dance, theater, music and performance while remaining true to his vision as a sculptor. (He even works with text: Made by Whites for Whites included a take-home brochure featuring essays by Henry Louis Gates Jr., David Breslin and more—a rare example of the artist feeling his visual language wasn't enough to express the meaning of his work.)

"I'm creating works that open themselves up to dance or theater, which can function from one extreme to the other, with space always allowing room for it to happen," he explains. His passion for expression through movement entered his system early and never left. After working until the early hours of the day, a college-age Cave would dance away his frustrations at gay clubs close to his studio at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he received his bachelor of fine arts degree in 1982. He would make himself a new piece of clothing each night. "Cruising wasn't really my thing; dancing was how I worked through everything," he says of his early forays into gay life in the late 1970s.

One of six brothers, Cave was born in Fulton, Missouri in an environment that quickly made him aware of the forces he





Cave made his first Soundsuit from twigs in 1992 in response to the L.A. police beating of Rodney King. Each weighs between 30 and 50 pounds and takes four to six months to construct. The Soundsuits on these pages were created in (from left) 2017, 2015, 2015 and 2016.

would spend much of his life fighting. “Racism and homophobia come in all shapes and forms, but it’s about muscling up,” he says.

Cave remembers his mother’s reaction when he dyed his hair blue in high school. Decades later, color and dance are still big parts of his identity—so much so that in April he’s bringing *The Let Go* to Chicago’s Navy Pier for a weeklong condensed program with local performers and musicians, free to the public.

His plans for this year also include an exhibition, curated by Faust, in Facility’s front windows. It will feature mainly local artists and designers and focus on “voting and voice,” two months before the November election. “We have to be positive and keep doing what we can do!” he says. With a laugh, he admits



“

It's all **fucking**
drag, honey.”



he's disappointed with 2020, which so far does not resemble the space saga he imagined when he was a teenager.

But Cave could change that.

...

Another plan for this year is a “next-level *Soundsuit*”—cast in bronze, 18 feet high and displayed as an outdoor monument.

In 1992 he made his first suit for what would become an army of genderless and nationless aliens invading museums and streets across the globe. The otherworldly sculptures, some of which can be activated by dancers, have become the signature works of Cave's oeuvre, combining all key elements of his practice. They're masterfully beaded and woven textile sculptures, representing the inclusive and celebratory roots of his vision through color, texture and dance. Sounds emanate from the materials, whether they're whirling buttons or the twigs that adorned his very first creation. They give the dancers agency and let them intervene in the space with unapologetic flamboyance. The performers' voiceless anonymity is supplemented by the materials' kinetic sounds, which Cave uses as metaphors for seeing beyond the surface and understanding the essence that constitutes our identities.

When I note the correlation between the *Soundsuits* and drag, he's quick to respond: “It's all fucking drag, honey.” Cave sees a clear parallel between performance and our day-to-day rituals of self-expression. “We're all in drag. Every day, we put it on depending on what's coming,” he says. He smiles with the wisdom of an artist who remembers wearing a Fiorucci skirt to school and bravely passing a group of teenagers on the street. “I just gained this inner power, keeping it moving and being fabulous.”

Today, the same mischievous glee is evident: “I could be in blue jeans from a thrift store, a fabulous little T-shirt and some running sneakers, but I may have on a leather jockstrap!”

...

Cave is one of the most community-driven, collaborative artists working today, sharing his platform with everyone from legendary choreographer Bill T. Jones to a local musician in search of a broader audience. He's happy to get out of his own way and allow other experiences to fold into his practice.

Here Hear, a major celebration of Cave's work at suburban Detroit's Cranbrook Art Museum in 2015, manifested his commitment to speech and giving voice to the silent. Returning



Top and above: Previously unpublished scenes from 2018's *The Let Go*, traveling to Chicago in April. **Left:** Previously unpublished image of *Augment*, part inflatable sculpture, part community experience inspired by the question "What brings you joy?" (On view in Boston through April.)



to the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where he received his master of fine arts degree in 1989, Cave invited hundreds of locals, including LGBTQ youths and students from various art programs, to participate. Over seven months, they collaborated in performances, photo shoots and dance workshops.

“The ingenuity of Nick’s practice extends to his strategies for how the artwork operates in the world,” says Laura Mott, the museum’s senior curator of contemporary art and design. “The resonance of this project has been astounding, from dinner tables to foundation board meetings. It’s often cited as the primary example of an artist ‘getting it right’ in Detroit.”

Cave describes his collaborative instinct in typically vivid terms: “You could drop me out of a plane anywhere in the world, and I can make an amazing project. Everybody wants to be acknowledged for what they can bring to the table. How do you give them that permission to stand in the light?”

It’s hard to imagine, but at one point Cave himself was not standing in the light. Back in the 1990s he was a creative nomad, launching shows, packing up and moving on to the next venue with no further plans. He was a structured free spirit who trained his voice by remaining steady and consistent. But around 1996 he woke up one day and said, “Now or never.” He left an amazing relationship behind and let everything go.

“My life changed overnight,” he says. He was “stepping up to fear, to the unknown.” During his emerging years, his work had been about following his nose. Once he’d stepped up, his mission became clear: “to remain on the outside, always ready to jump into the center—not the outer edge but into the *center*.” When he jumps back out again, “what I’ve delivered in the center has to take care of itself.”

• • •

These days Cave sits in silence for two hours every night; he says it brings him closer to the truth. Mondays and



Sea Sick, from the exhibition *Made by Whites for Whites*, 2014, mixed media including oil paintings, ceramic container, cast hands and plastic ship.

Thursdays are reserved for his 24 graduate students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he is a professor of fashion, body and garment.

“Fashion is a form of advertisement that I can make a political statement with,” he says, sharing his idea to produce a 10-look collection to follow each of his solo exhibitions, which he would debut during fashion weeks.

Fashion and garment are manifest in a given Nick Cave piece, but what about what lies beneath them? The body means everything to Cave: It’s a tool to experience pain and glory, the good and the bad. It’s both a target—as *Until* sharply declares—and an instrument for seduction and sexual desire, most apparent in his wild, balletic *Soundsuits*. But it’s more than that.

“The body is the mechanism that grounds us to humanity,” he says. He finds drive sexy; motivation turns him on. He sees himself as a messenger delivering deeds to ambassadors, who ensure their urgency is maintained. Once again, he speaks through the body, its power to connect.

“I am able to use art as a vehicle for change,” he says, “but this is bigger than me.”

“

I am an artist
with civic
responsibility,
so how do I
use the voice
I am **fortunate**
to have?”



Above: *Rescue*, 2013, mixed media including ceramic birds, metal flowers, ceramic mastiff, vintage settee, and light fixture. **Right:** *Speak Louder*, 2011, mixed media including black mother-of-pearl buttons, embroidery floss, upholstery, metal armature and mannequins. **Opposite:** *Soundsuit*, 2010.





PASSION IN PARADISE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ANA DIAS



APRIL PLAYMATE



Singer-songwriter, legal eagle, motivational speaker and April Playmate **Marsha Elle** is making history in these pages and far beyond. Join her as she lights up Tulum and tells her astonishing story

When I got my first prosthetic leg, at the age of five, I saw it as a gift.

I was born with proximal femoral focal deficiency, a condition that affected how my right leg was growing. Throughout my adolescence I received different treatments—including an amputation—and tried various types of prosthetic legs to compensate for the way my body was growing at any given time.

I was born in Haiti, but my family moved to Orlando when I was only nine months old so I could receive medical treatment. The move gave me an opportunity to go to school and start walking for the first time. It was frustrating that they didn't have prosthetics in my complexion, but at that point I was just grateful to have a leg. Eventually the technology got better, but it was a long time till I had a prosthetic that matched my dark skin.

In middle school my classmates would stare at my leg when I passed them in the hallways. I would try to leave class before the bell rang to avoid it. I'd wear baggy clothes—not only to hide my leg but to hide my whole body. I began struggling with bulimia.

My faith, my mom and my love for music helped me get through those tough times, but my ultimate saving grace was community. When I turned 16 I began attending an amputee summer camp in Salt Lake City. It was the first time I met anyone with my specific condition. I found people I could intimately relate to. I could ask them stuff like “Hey, how do *you* clean your prosthetic?”

I was so inspired when I got back to Orlando that I wrote a song called “Unlimbted.” Being at that camp was the beginning of accepting myself, and the song captured that. I realized that being different was a good thing.

“Unlimbted” brought me closer to my passion for music. Growing up I always dreamed of being a pop star. I liked that people couldn't judge me on what they saw; they could only judge what they heard. Music made me feel I had a voice. It gave me a purpose and allowed me to share my story with the world.

When I released my first album, amputees from all over the world began reaching out and sharing how my music had resonated with them. It made me want to open up even more. For the cover of my second album, *Brave*, I decided to show my leg. I used to hide it (I didn't wear shorts until I was 23), but now I feel I owe it to my fans to be vulnerable.

Brave jump-started my career as a model and motivational speaker. Pictures of me started going viral, and opportunities came pouring in. Next thing I knew, Jada Pinkett Smith was sharing a photo of me on her Instagram. The world was embracing something I'd been ashamed of. There are still times when I feel insecure, but I've learned to love and accept myself. Modeling has helped me amplify my story and show other disabled people that we're beautiful the way we are.

When Jameela Jamil asked me to be the April 2020 Playmate, I couldn't help crying. Never in a million years did I think I would be a Playmate. The world is becoming more inclusive, and it's inspiring to know that I can help move the needle.

When I get caught up in booking jobs, I have to stop and remind myself why I'm doing this. It's not about money or success; it's about me and my amazing community. As I say in “Unlimbted,” I'll never give in.

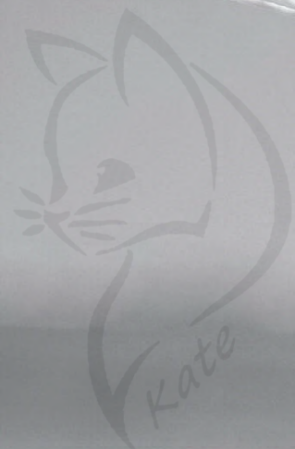












DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE: Cap-Haïtien, Haiti **CURRENT CITY:** Miami, Florida

ON ICONS

I grew up in the 1990s and early 2000s, so Britney Spears, Cher, Celine Dion, Christina Aguilera and Janet Jackson were my idols. When Christina Aguilera came out with “Beautiful,” I bought it three times. That’s my song.

ON ATTENTION

I get a lot of attention at events and on Instagram for my leg. I used to joke and tell my prosthetist, “People love your leg,” but sometimes I feel like saying, “Okay, look up here. Hi, I’m Marsha.” I think people are just excited because it’s something they haven’t seen before in the media. My story always takes precedence, and I’ve learned to be okay with that.

ON RISK

My resolution this year was to jump in head-first and not overthink anything. Only one week into the year, I confessed my love for someone!

ON BOOKS

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho is one of my favorite books. I also love reading autobiographies; Nelson Mandela’s is one of my favorites.

ON HUSTLING

For the past two years I’ve worked as an independent contractor in litigation. It gives me the flexibility to focus on my true passions of acting, singing and modeling.

ON MOM LOVE

My mother has always believed in me, and she never babied me. She would sign me up for random stuff like gymnastics and tell the instructors, “Her leg might fly off, but she’s very good on one, and she’ll balance.”

ON FEAR

In Miami we have *huge* iguanas. You may see an iguana, but I see an alligator.

ON WATER

I love water. It’s part of the reason I love Miami so much. I’m like a fish. I love the beach—and also bubble baths. I’ll light a candle, put on some music and tune everything out.

ON SOCIALS

I don’t hesitate to delete mean comments and block trolls. I do it not just for my mental health but for the sake of my fans. I want them to be immersed in positivity when they come to my page.

ON SHAME

I shouldn’t have to be ashamed of my sexuality. I can’t help that I have big lips and am naturally thicker.

ON PRIDE

Look where this leg has taken me—it didn’t just take me to school; it took me across the world to freaking Hollywood!



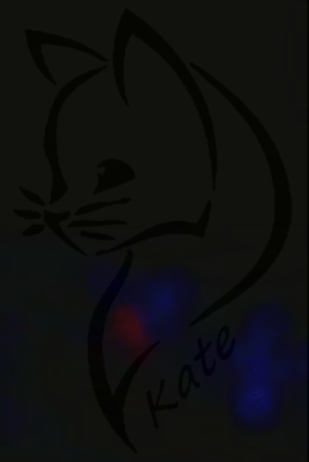


APRIL 2020 PLAYMATE





Maly Siri



a fresh bite of
PEACHES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN PFLUGER



The multimedia artist and pop provocateur continues to fight for erotic liberation—this time with the help of a dexterous sex toy

BY **MARY KATHARINE TRAMONTANA**

A new era for Peaches began with an online review of a men's pale-pink silicone double masturbator she happened upon in January 2019. The multimedia artist, best known for her sex-drenched music, found herself shocked by two facets of the clip.

"The first was the look of the object," she says. "It was so disembodied, like 'Danger!' Here's what a woman could be reduced to: a mouth with some red lipstick and a vagina."

Then there was the reviewer himself. "It became clear he'd never had sex with a woman but was projecting that women can't give him what he can get with this toy," she says. "He was talking about having that 'Shut up and suck my cock, bitch' fantasy. I felt sorry for him."

Over a flat white at Godshot cafe in Berlin last fall, Peaches recalls pondering the device's features. One end mimics a woman's mouth and the other a vulva, so the toy could theoretically pleasure itself if it had sovereignty over its body. The idea grew: If, in an alternate realm, double masturbators could speak and move, they could "get together, rename themselves and rewrite their own narrative."

That idea became *Whose Jizz Is This?*, a 10,000-square-foot multisensory feat—"a deconstructed musical in 14 scenes," in her words—that debuted last August at Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany. (There are plans to move the work to North America in the next year.) *Jizz* tells the story of that imagined universe in which the "Fleshies" come alive and win sexual emancipation. Animatronics, sculptures and film scenes are ignited in intervals by a combination of lights, movement and sound. The project took eight months to execute, with collaborators including experimental musician Black Cracker, technological art hub House of North and (aptly named) fetish design house RubAddiction.

Far away from her brilliantly intense stage persona, Peaches takes a sip of her drink and articulates one of the project's central questions: "Does jizz come only from a male source?"



In one piece, "Cold Turkey," the Fleshies are seen learning about themselves, turning themselves inside out, vibrating on their own without a human's touch. In "Saturnalia Returns," the Fleshies and other sex toys are depicted bonding on a psychedelic journey. Here, the human viewer lies on the floor, taking on a passive role while the Fleshies dominate, mirroring a society with a rigidly enforced active-passive sexual binary.

The lure of masturbators is that they take on the submissive role expected of women without argument; they're always ready and willing to be penetrated, and when they are, their experience doesn't need to be considered. But in *Whose Jizz Is This?* a group of Fleshies unite on a large screen to speak out against their erotic subjugation and share their stories and their dreams:

"I will seek the pleasure of myself. I am deserving of pleasure. I deserve to enjoy sexual experience. I deserve to share my intimacy with whomever I please. I can decide when and how I want to give pleasure. I can decide when and how I want to get pleasure."

A useful mantra for any human who's fed up with being jizzed into without respect or reciprocity.

...

Peaches, born Merrill Nisker, proved her rebellious spirit from a young age.



“We need **healthy** masculinity represented in a way that intersectional **feminism** and queer culture are going to accept, help and **nurture.**”

As a child in Toronto she refused to bend to authority and disregarded any lesson at her private Jewish school that didn't foster creativity. Theater became a valuable outlet, and after college at York University, she launched a children's drama program at a local YMCA. She was so inspired by the students' ability to abandon inhibitions that she channeled their wild energy into her nighttime performances across Toronto's underground music scene.

At 30, she left Canada for a new turn in Berlin and created the alter ego we've come to know today, inspired by her complex relationship with pop culture and conversations around sex. In 2000 her persona crystallized with her first album, *The Teaches of Peaches*.

Each of the album's 11 fearless and catchy tracks is a study of gendered sexual politics. “Fuck the Pain Away” employs lo-fi rap beats and a big bass line to deliver the opening: “Suckin’ on my titties like you wanted me/Callin’ me all the time...” The song gained in popularity despite being too raunchy to chart, finding its way into clubs everywhere and Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation*.

“I’m not interested in clean,” says Peaches, who has since toured with John Waters and collaborated with Iggy Pop, both icons of depravity.

Twenty years and five studio albums later, the 53-year-old has maintained a linear artistic assault on systemic misogyny. Her latest work is a rallying

cry for anyone striving to abandon objectification and be treated as equal to men.

...

A pre-liberated Fleshie, upon close inspection, exemplifies the problematic way we talk about sex. Just as these masturbators were created for men to insert themselves into, we speak of heteronormative human intimacy as the man performing an act that the woman receives: Penises “pound” and “fuck” supposedly passive and vulnerable female orifices. We have countless words for male masturbation, but we struggle to find phrases to mark its female equivalent.

Penises are scarcely featured in *Whose Jizz Is This?* The absence is conspicuous, a ghostly reminder that modern discussions of sex focus almost entirely on male pleasure. With “Glory Hall,” Peaches redirects the focus: This part of the show is an immersive play on the conventional glory hole (an aperture in a wall, just big enough for a penis, so another individual can pleasure the male extremity without face-to-face contact), but the Glory Hall is large enough for individuals to walk through and is lined with 144 Fleshies.

Learned sexual behaviors perpetuate the orgasm gap, or the decades-persistent finding that men have dramatically more orgasms than women in straight sexual encounters. A 2017 study from the International Academy of Sex Research's *Archives of Sexual Behavior* reports that 95 percent of heterosexual men almost always reach orgasm during sex, compared with 65 percent of heterosexual women. Additionally, according to sociologist and Occidental College professor Lisa Wade, lesbians and bisexual women orgasm about 83 percent of the time, “or about the same frequency that *men* who sleep with women enjoy.” She also suggests that women orgasm easily and reliably when masturbating.

“There’s nothing natural about the orgasm gap, especially given the fact that most women are multi-orgasmic and most men aren’t,” Wade says. “People are just not choosing activities that produce female orgasm, or not choosing to do them long enough.”

This discrepancy in orgasms can be partially explained by



Kate





phallic imperatives—gendered sexual scripts that prioritize men’s experience and pleasure. A straight man may believe the female orgasm is incidental because vaginal sex is the only “real sex,” even though clitoral contact (cunnilingus or rubbing) may be necessary for a woman to orgasm. Of course, stigmatizing female sexuality, enforcing negative body image and socializing girls to please others also contribute to the problem. Pleasure equality, Wade concludes, will never happen without gender equality.

The only path to erotic liberation is to abandon the notion that somebody gets fucked and somebody else does the fucking—consensual kink excluded. Instead, partners must do what the Fleshies do: When one is feeling tortured and in pain (like a featured Fleshie that vomits and bleeds), stand up and say, “I can’t take this anymore.” Partners must value egalitarian sexual encounters that are about discovery and pleasure rather than achievement or status. We need an entirely new perspective on sex.

Prioritizing women’s orgasms by putting the clitoris front and center in our

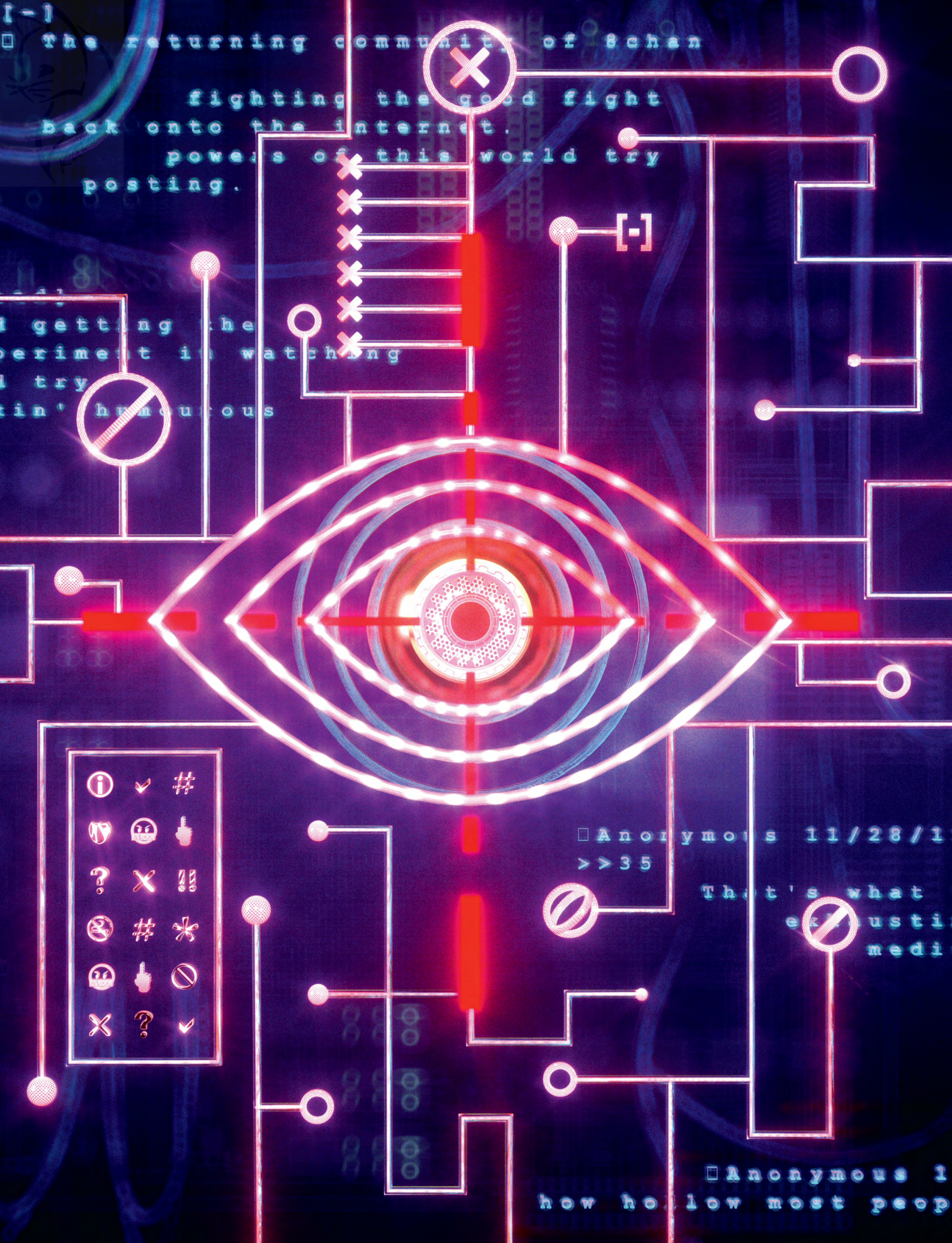
art and culture is an essential part of that transformation—one given new life by Peaches. She takes up space in the male-dominated industries of music, art and theater as “a form of activism that’s entertaining and hopefully inspires creativity. I’ve always said I want the mainstream to come closer to me.”

And she’s ready to continue pushing boundaries in her fight for our sexual freedom. The stakes are high. “There are more new abortion laws and more trans murders than ever,” she says. “We know how to say ‘toxic masculinity,’ but what does healthy masculinity look like? What does trans masculinity look like? That’s not my conversation, but it needs to be a real one. We need healthy masculinity represented in a way that intersectional feminism and queer culture are going to accept, help and nurture.”

In the meantime, as we usher in a new decade in which we have the chance to liberate our patriarchal sexual landscape, repeat after me, woman-identified and gender-queer readers:

“I will seek the pleasure of myself. I am deserving of pleasure. I can decide when and how I want to give pleasure. I can decide when and how I want to get pleasure.” 





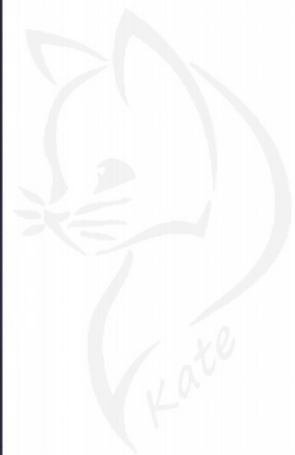
[1-] The returning community of 8chan
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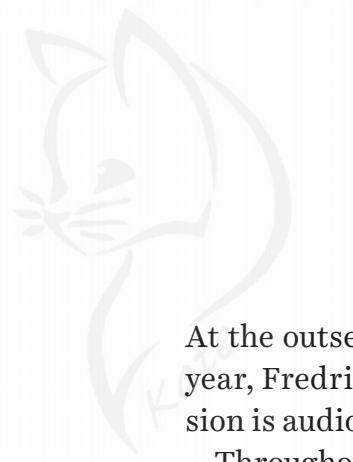


ILLUSTRATIONS BY **BLAKE KATHRYN**

The True Threat

8chan founder and former “king of the trolls” **Fredrick Brennan** is fighting a multifront war over how—and whether—to counter hate speech; here, a report from the front lines

BY **DONOVAN FARLEY**



At the outset of an interview held on Christmas Eve of this past year, Fredrick Brennan expresses some relief that our Skype session is audio only: It allows him to relax a bit more.

Throughout this conversation and over two months of further Skype calls and Twitter DMs, the 8chan founder is erudite, outgoing and quick to laugh. This is hard to square with his former reputation as king of the trolls—a free-speech absolutist and overlord of the anonymous and unmoderated chat forum known these days as a global gathering place for white male extremists, an incubator of QAnon and a repository of manifestos written by mass shooters.

Now in his mid-20s and based in the Philippines, Brennan is weary of discussing the many ways his creation slipped out of his control, but he seems to feel duty-bound to do so. He left the site in 2018, having launched it five years earlier, and last year began to speak out on Twitter and in the press. He claims that 8chan, now rebranded as 8kun, is such a danger that it should be permanently deplatformed, an idea repellent both to 8chan devotees and to, well, every other source who went on record for this story, from a developer to a senator to the site's current owners.

Beyond his obvious intelligence, Brennan has an almost child-like quality that has a lot to do with his newfound enthusiasm for the real world, where events such as his recent marriage have helped draw him from the darkness. He displays little of the awkwardness that often defines your typical tech genius. But he wasn't always like this.

At the age of 14, already dealing with painful isolation as a result of a congenital condition (he was born with osteogenesis imperfecta, or brittle bone disease, which stunted his growth and keeps him in a wheelchair), Brennan, along with his similarly disabled brother, was placed in New York's foster care system. The internet became his sanctuary.

"When the internet first came into my house, it was very different to be able to communicate that way, but it also became a replacement for real life," he says. "And when you're a kid, you don't know it's less than."

Brennan insists he didn't intend to create a platform for mass murderers. Just as Facebook began as a site where Harvard students could rate one another's attractiveness and evolved into a cultural behemoth with the power to affect presidential elections, 8chan grew, albeit on a much smaller scale, into something its creator never imagined.

"Platforms over time develop a personality. 8chan on its first day was never going to get an El Paso shooter posting on it," he says, referring to the 2019 massacre in a Texas Walmart that left 22 innocent people dead. Adding that incident to the shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, and Poway, California, 74 people were killed last year by men who'd posted their manifestos on 8chan.

"The platform and the community there developed to allow that kind of behavior," Brennan says, "and that's something that takes years to happen."

His use of the word *personality* raises questions: What other human traits might 8chan possess? Does its ability to change offer hope that its condition isn't terminal?

...

8chan is hardly the first image-and-discussion board of its type: It followed 4chan, which was launched in the mid-2000s by current Google employee Christopher Poole. (The idea for 4chan came, in turn, from Poole's experience on the Japanese site 2chan.) Poole's stated ethos for the platform was "a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images."

The freewheeling camaraderie offered on 4chan and its ilk was

welcome in the face of growing internet regulations. 4chan first sprang into the national consciousness when the hacking collective Anonymous began using the board to discuss plans for hacks and pranks. It also bred legendary memes such as Rickrolling, lolcats and Pepe the Frog—the heavy-lidded cartoon amphibian that mutated, without its creator's consent, into a hard-right mascot. Racists, homophobes, pedophiles and misogynists, drawn by the site's lax moderation, used their shared beliefs to harass and troll those who opposed them, both online and off.

When the Gamergate controversy—a loose campaign of doxxing and threats leveled at female video game developers and writers—erupted in 2014, Poole banned all discussion of the matter. This prompted outrage among the site's heaviest users, which in turn prompted a migration to 8chan, at that time a little-known offshoot. Soon the de facto home for white nationalists and neo-Nazis, Brennan's platform also became such a popular hub for child pornography that the site was briefly delisted from Google Search.

QAnon—a collection of baseless conspiracy theories revolving around Q, a supposed government insider who insists President Trump is fighting a secret battle against a cabal of Democratic elites who run a satanic child-sex ring—exists on the board because the poster's identity can be confirmed only via their 8chan ID. That is to say, no one knows Q's real-world identity for certain, but their 8chan handle at least suggests that one person is running the show. At press time there are dozens of Q-related Facebook groups all over the world, with the top few seeing nearly 2,000 posts a day. At least 19 current congressional candidates have voiced support for the conspiracy theory, which has allegedly resulted in several acts of violence and one murder.

Brennan hints at the inner shift that eventually compelled him to leave 8chan: "I was one of these libertarian idiots thinking, Oh, you know, my in-box is just ideologically diverse—even though it was mostly Nazis e-mailing me."

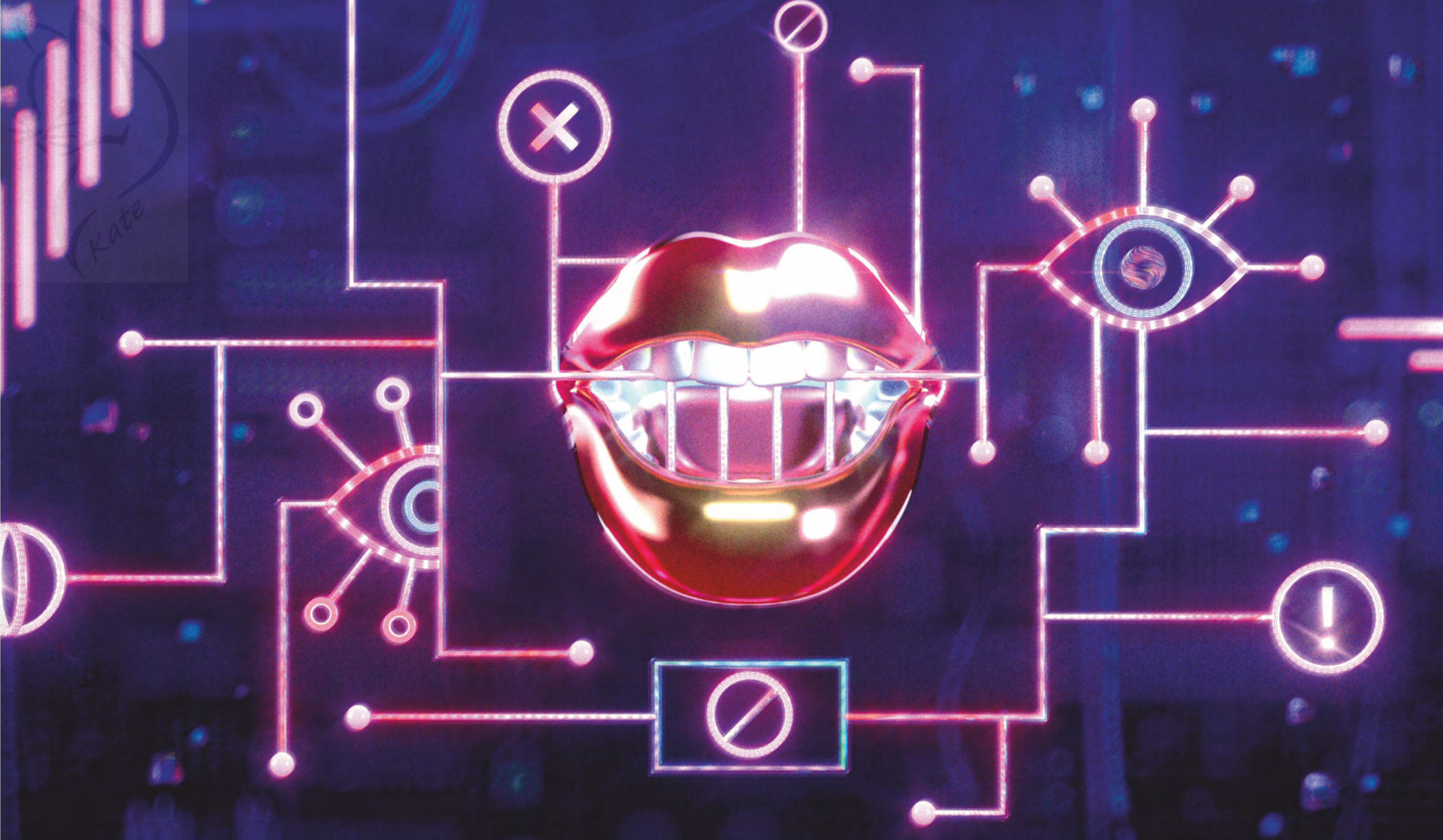
As the site's popularity intensified—according to Brennan, it mushroomed from around 100 posts a day to more than 4,000 an hour in 2014—the founder became overwhelmed by the gargantuan task of keeping the board online: Bandwidth and content-flagging issues were constant. Suffering from severe burnout and strapped for funds, he agreed to a partnership with internet entrepreneur Jim Watkins in 2014, on the condition that Brennan would relocate from the U.S. to Watkins's base in the Philippines and be retained to help run the site.

Watkins, an Army veteran, pig farmer and self-described serial entrepreneur in his mid-50s, accumulated a great deal of his fortune via his first start-up, a porn website designed to circumvent 1990s Japanese censorship laws. The experience not only enriched Watkins (whose ubiquitous uniform of graphic T-shirt and shorts exudes something of a "Roger Stone on vacation" vibe), it instilled in him a disdain for censorship and a reputation for circumventing it.

Brennan sold the site to Jim Watkins in 2015, and Jim's son Ron emerged as the project's new champion. It was Ron who first told Jim about Brennan, and it's Ron who works on 8kun every day.

Initially the move was a blessing. The trio were kindred spirits who forged something of a bond under the site's motto: Embrace infamy. Brennan, however, began to tire of the daily moral degradation clogging his in-box. By December 2018 he'd had enough.

"The most important change in mind-set was that I came to believe Jim and Ron do not operate 8chan in good faith but rather to twisted ends," he says. "Their actions continue to betray them—for example, helping QAnon post and making sure QAnon's



identity would remain stable [during the transition from 8chan to 8kun], which they did for no one else.” Ron Watkins, whose father is suing Brennan for libel over remarks he tweeted last year, addressed these claims via Twitter DM: “Fred is currently fighting a criminal libel case, so I can’t recommend him as a good source of information.” Pressed about possible connections to Q, Ron said, “Nobody from our team has had private contact with Q.”

Last March, when a member of 8chan attacked two mosques in New Zealand, killing 51 and injuring 50 more, Brennan’s relief at having left the site began to transmute into anger and shame. God help me if I started this, he thought. He vowed to make ending 8chan his new life aspiration. Little did he know the year’s horrors had just begun.

...

Ron Watkins is unfailingly polite in all our Twitter DM chats but gets immediately down to business when I raise the subject of censorship. He skates around my questions concerning any guilt he may feel about what happens on the site. What is clear is that he adamantly believes in 8chan’s mission of total autonomy for online speech.

“Corporations are taking control of most online spaces and removing speech while citing their increasingly restrictive terms and conditions of service,” he says. “They frenziedly overreach with such impunity that the government does not even need to participate in censorship anymore.”

Of course not everyone on 8chan/kun is a hateful degenerate, and Ron is quick to point out that those voices would bear the brunt of deplatforming as well. “Our entire platform with thousands of users is being actively silenced because companies that hold too much power over the infrastructure of the internet have decided that certain opinions shouldn’t be allowed to be heard,” he says. “We need to begin discussing an internet bill of rights that addresses content neutrality, data privacy and a host of other issues affecting the daily online lives of all Americans.”

8chan vanished after multiple service providers cut ties in the wake of El Paso. At that time, Alexa’s internet-traffic-ranking service listed 8chan in the top 5,000 sites worldwide—an impressive feat for a site that doesn’t appear in Google searches. The gap between 8chan’s disappearance and 8kun’s birth three months later came at a heavy price for Jim and Ron Watkins: At press time Alexa ranked 8kun 45,094.

When Jim was called before Congress after the El Paso shooting (he wore a QAnon pin affixed to his collar), he made many of these points. Brennan tells me this appearance was a sham. The government, he says, lacks the internet literacy to comprehend what it’s dealing with.

“What Congress gets wrong is they always call in the bad actor, the people who’ve done wrong,” he says. “What they need to do is also bring in 4chan admins and ask, ‘How do you guys do it? How did you clean up the site?’”

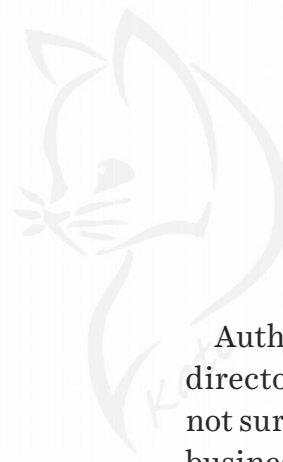
Judging by the views of a range of techies and legal experts, the site is not the unknown entity here.

...

The true-threat doctrine, established by the 1969 Supreme Court case *Watts v. United States*, attempts to lay the groundwork for courts to differentiate between potentially dangerous statements and those made in jest. But in a world where an innocuous cartoon frog and the “OK” hand signal can be appropriated by neofascists, how can one hope to identify and track potentially violent users?

“Defining hate speech is notoriously difficult, and therefore content monitoring at scale is extraordinarily challenging,” says David Cole, national legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union, via e-mail. “The range of information, the volume of material and the nuances of context make the task virtually impossible.”

There’s no consensus on when internet speech enters the realm of the harmful and illegal, no line drawn in the sand à la falsely shouting “fire” in a crowded theater. Perhaps no line can be drawn on ground that shifts by the second.



Author, *New York Times* columnist and former Fusion TV news director Kevin Roose has written extensively about 8chan. “I’m not sure there should be a ‘line’ at all,” he says. “These are private businesses that all have to make, and live with, their own choices about where to draw the line. Some platforms have amplified the voices of reprehensible people and allowed dangerous movements to hijack their services, and their executives will have to live with the repercussions of those choices for the rest of their lives.”

But if the meteoric rise and apparent disregard for social responsibility shown by giants like Facebook have taught us anything, it’s that tech titans can’t be trusted to do what’s right when it harms their bottom line. Longtime Democratic senator Ron Wyden of Oregon, who introduced the first Senate net-neutrality bill in 2006, tells me the answer may lie in economics.

“There’s no doubt that mainstream platforms like Facebook have failed for far too long to step up and respond to the slime and hate that has no place on a site that also hosts family photo albums and local business pages,” he says. “The largest sites have grown complacent, thanks to their massive size and market dominance, so they have little fear that new competitors with more responsible policies will emerge as true rivals.”

Indeed, essentially every person who uses the internet must adhere to the content-moderation whims of a handful of unelected people whose employers profit directly from online hate and disinformation. Although he opposes government interference that limits online speech—“The last thing I want to do is put Donald Trump and William Barr in charge of a government speech police who decide what people can say online”—Senator Wyden thinks decreasing the power a few people in Silicon Valley wield over billions of others’ online experience could help.

“It’s appropriate for the Justice Department or the Federal Trade Commission to look at whether the largest tech companies are abusing their market position to prevent real competition, to the detriment of internet users across the country,” Wyden says. “I think real competition would go a long way toward relegating these hateful sentiments to the dark corners of the internet.”

Cole echoes this sentiment: “An antitrust approach may well make sense, to the extent that one of the problems is the control of vast platforms of public debate by a handful of companies.”

But how long would that take, and in the meantime how many sick men will post their manifestos to an unmoderated forum that helps galvanize their poisoned thoughts into action?

• • •

Ash Bhat’s RoBhat Labs develops apps—including BotCheck.me, a Google Chrome extension that alerts Twitter users when they encounter fake accounts—to combat a number of online ills. He forcefully opines that the answer lies not in tech nor in government oversight.

“Being able to speak and be heard goes down to our evolution,” he says via e-mail. “We can’t deplatform online communities, especially when we disagree with them. The fact that people are killing people is the problem, not deplatforming. We’ve seen this already! We’ll shut down a site and it’ll inevitably pop right back up. As a society, the shootings are a sign that there’s something incredibly wrong. If anything, we should be listening to these voices. These may be our brothers and sisters—literally.”

Although Bhat and Brennan disagree on deplatforming, both refer to the sites’ users as victims. The men on these sites likely band together because they share feelings of being left behind, of being unloved. Via the sites, they discover human connection, reprehensible though its conduit may be, that their lives previously lacked. Ironically, they can be seen as victims of the same

dehumanizing technology through which they’ve found fellowship.

Decentralization, a strategy gaining momentum as the general public reaches a crisis with online-inspired murders, could be another way to break the cycle. Decentralization means users control their own data and resources and disseminate them from their own, much smaller networks. This runs counter to centralized computing, wherein the majority of functions are carried out from remote sources owned and operated by corporations. The allure of such a system is that smaller players could wrest back some of the power currently being hoarded by the likes of Facebook, Google, Amazon, YouTube and Twitter. This would make deplatforming nearly impossible, but the hope would be that once big tech’s immense power is diminished, increased competition would force sites to become more beholden to users who don’t want to share online space with neo-Nazis.

The Mark Zuckerbergs of the world are unlikely to give up their power without a protracted fight, yet Bhat sees this as a more realistic solution—or at least a breaking point.

“Taking the longer-term lens, the clock is ticking for us to figure this out. The internet seems to be transitioning toward decentralization—even Jack Dorsey and Twitter are taking steps toward this,” Bhat says. “Someday soon we won’t be able to deplatform these voices. It’s now or then that we start listening to them.”

But this approach cuts both ways: It promises immunity to users, no matter how hateful they may be, while compelling moderators to be smarter about keeping potentially dangerous language off their platforms. It’s impossible to predict which side would win out, or even when this day would come. Perhaps that’s why Brennan is pushing in the other direction.

• • •

Ron Watkins likens 8kun’s plight to that of public figures who’ve been felled by cancel culture.

“As we enter the start of a new decade, cancel culture has taken hold, and societal shunning is becoming more and more in vogue, with deplatforming representing the internet’s equivalent,” he says, noting that, thanks to Fredrick Brennan, “8kun weathered many deplatforming attempts even before a single new post was uploaded to the website.”

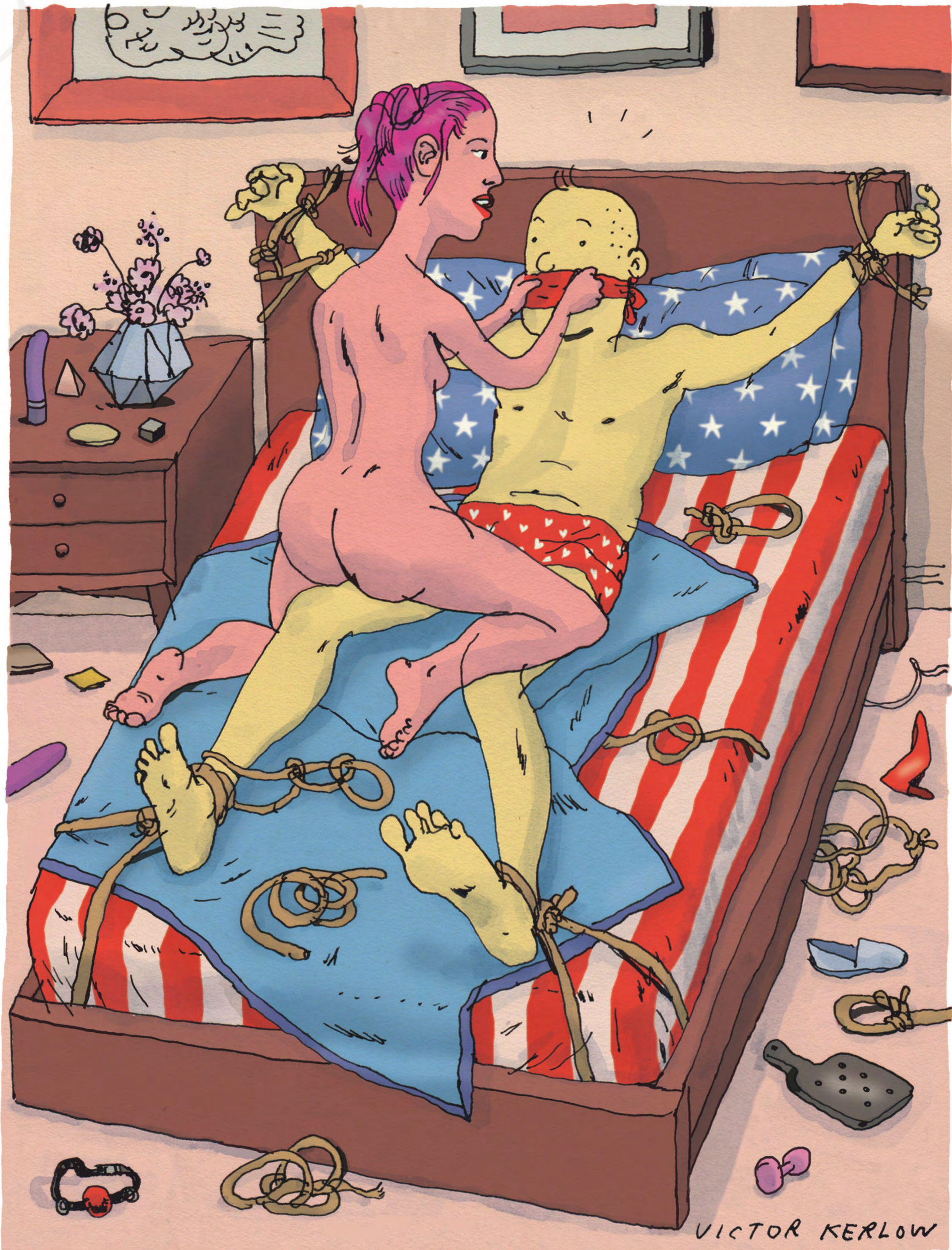
The amorphous nature of the internet—and the “societal shunning” Watkins observes in the real world—means that confronting online hate speech that begets real-world violence can be accomplished only via a diversity of tactics. Internet literacy for politicians and law enforcement, yes; confronting tech monopolies, yes. But even more so it seems we should reappraise the effects the internet can have on individuals and their perception of the real world.

Consider that for this piece I spoke with sources from all stations of life located all over the globe with an ease unimaginable at the dawn of this century. The fact that I was able to gather these voices without leaving my desk is awe-inspiring, just as it’s an undoubtedly beautiful thing that a lonely boy in a wheelchair can find community and happiness online.

But as this article was coming together, 8kun users were lamenting the arrest of three white supremacists linked to an extremist group that had threatened violence at the Second Amendment gathering in Virginia on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. They saw it as a missed opportunity for carnage and violence.

Fredrick Brennan tells me at one point that part of the problem with the internet is that it has “no tribal elders, no oral history of what it means or what you should do with it or who should be using it.” We are writing that history now. What kind of humanity we imbue this moment with is up to us.





"This doesn't mean I don't believe in freedom of speech, okay?"



PLAYMATES

JANUARY



VENELA

FEBRUARY



MEGAN MOORE

MARCH



MIKI HAMANO

JULY



TEELA LAROUX

AUGUST



GEENA ROCERO

SEPTEMBER



SOPHIE O'NEIL

POLAROID PHOTOGRAPHY BY
CHLOE CHIPPENDALE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ALI MITTON

STYLING BY
KELLEY ASH



OF THE YEAR

APRIL



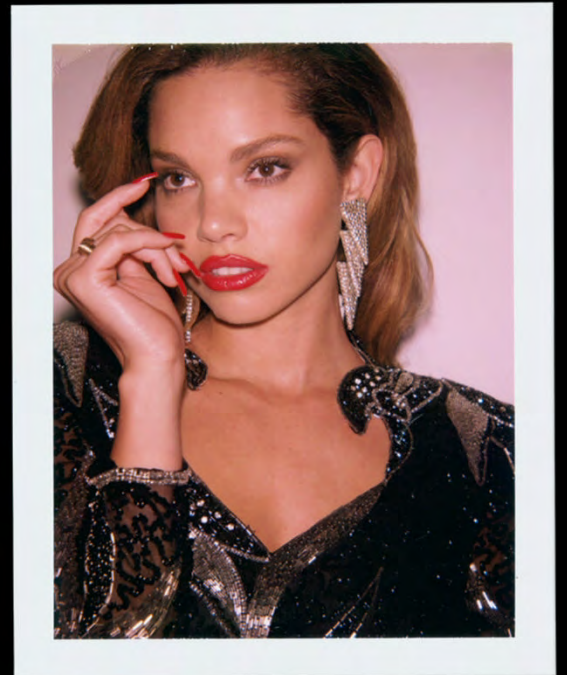
FO PORTER

MAY



ABIGAIL O'NEILL

JUNE



YOLI LARA

OCTOBER



HILDA DIAS PIMENTEL

NOVEMBER



GILLIAN CHAN

DECEMBER



JORDY MURRAY

IT'S A DILEMMA THAT HAS PLAGUED US SINCE 1960, WHEN THE FIRST PLAYMATE OF THE YEAR WAS CROWNED: HOW ON EARTH DO WE CHOOSE A SINGLE WINNER OUT OF 12 EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN WHOSE BACKGROUNDS, PASSIONS AND TALENTS ARE AS FAR-REACHING AS HUMANITY ITSELF? THAT'S WHY, HAVING GATHERED THEM EARLY THIS YEAR FOR A SUMPTUOUS SHOOT IN HOLMBY HILLS, CALIFORNIA, WE HEREBY ORDAIN ALL OUR 2019 PLAYMATES EQUALLY PMOY. ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES YOU'LL SEE THEIR RADIANT SELVES AGAINST A BACKDROP OF SUBTLE SUBTERFUGE AND SUSPENSE. WHAT'S IN HILDA'S BRIEFCASE? WILL MIKI'S KEY OPEN IT? WE'RE NOT TELLING—YET.



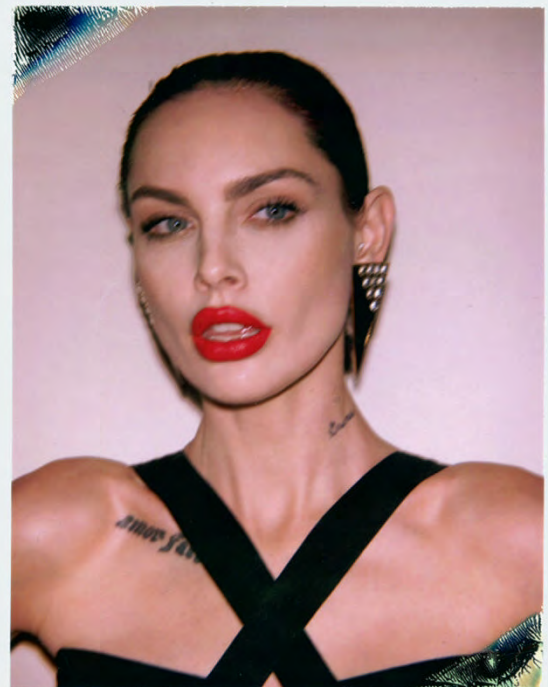






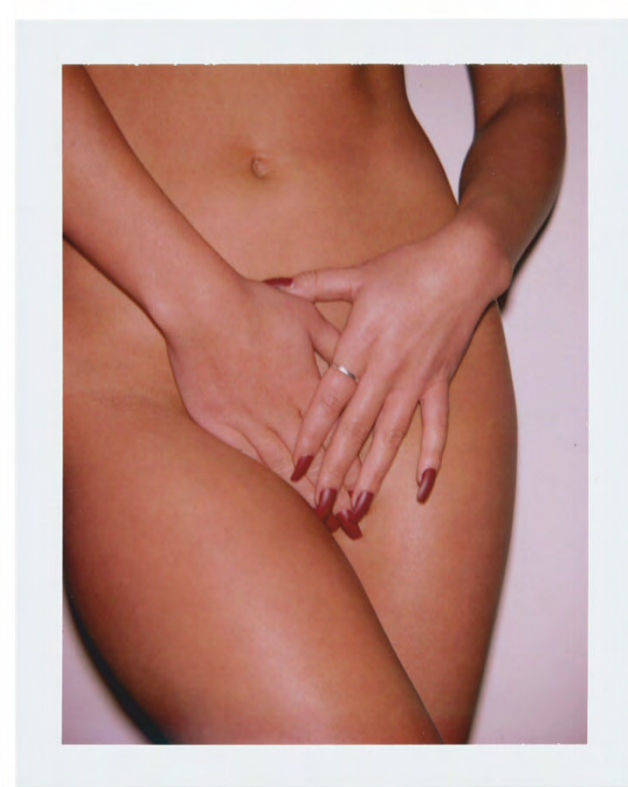
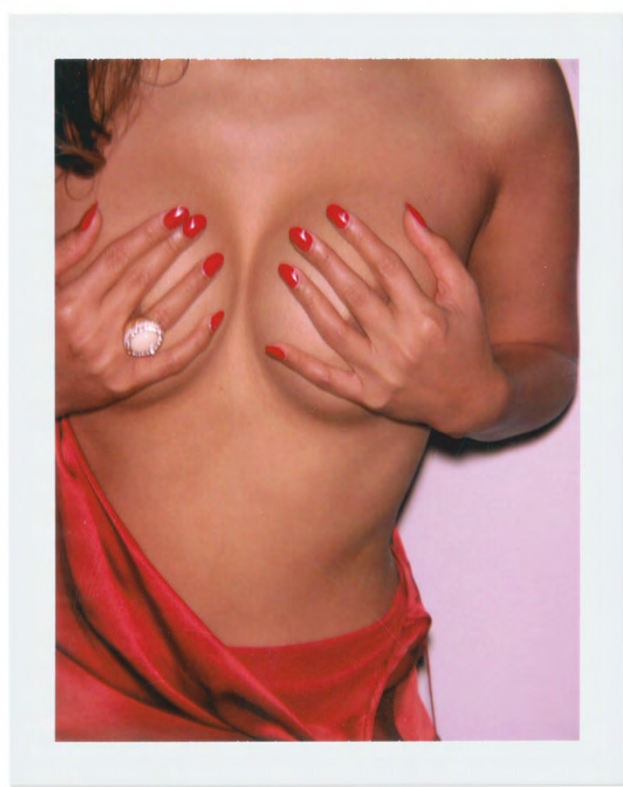
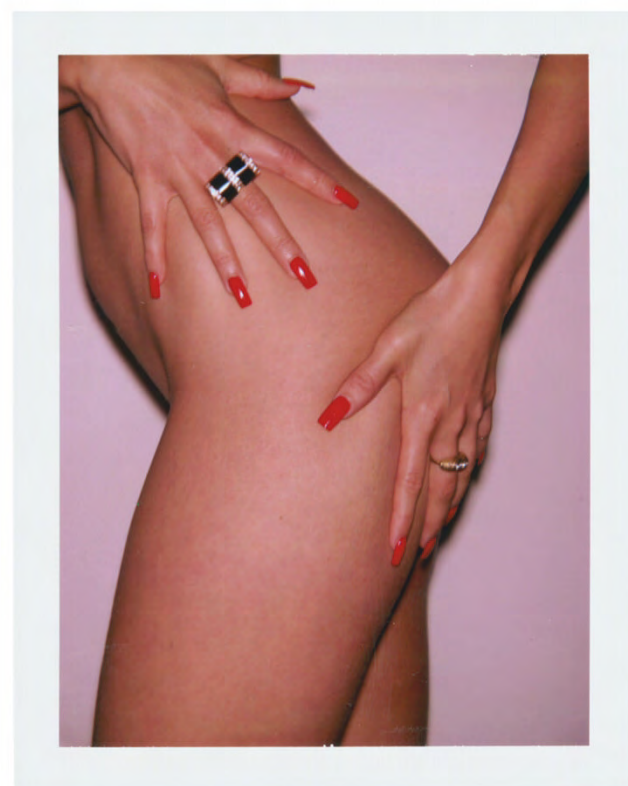
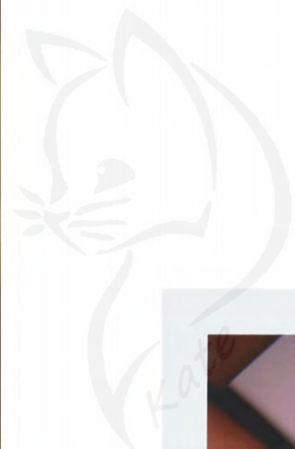








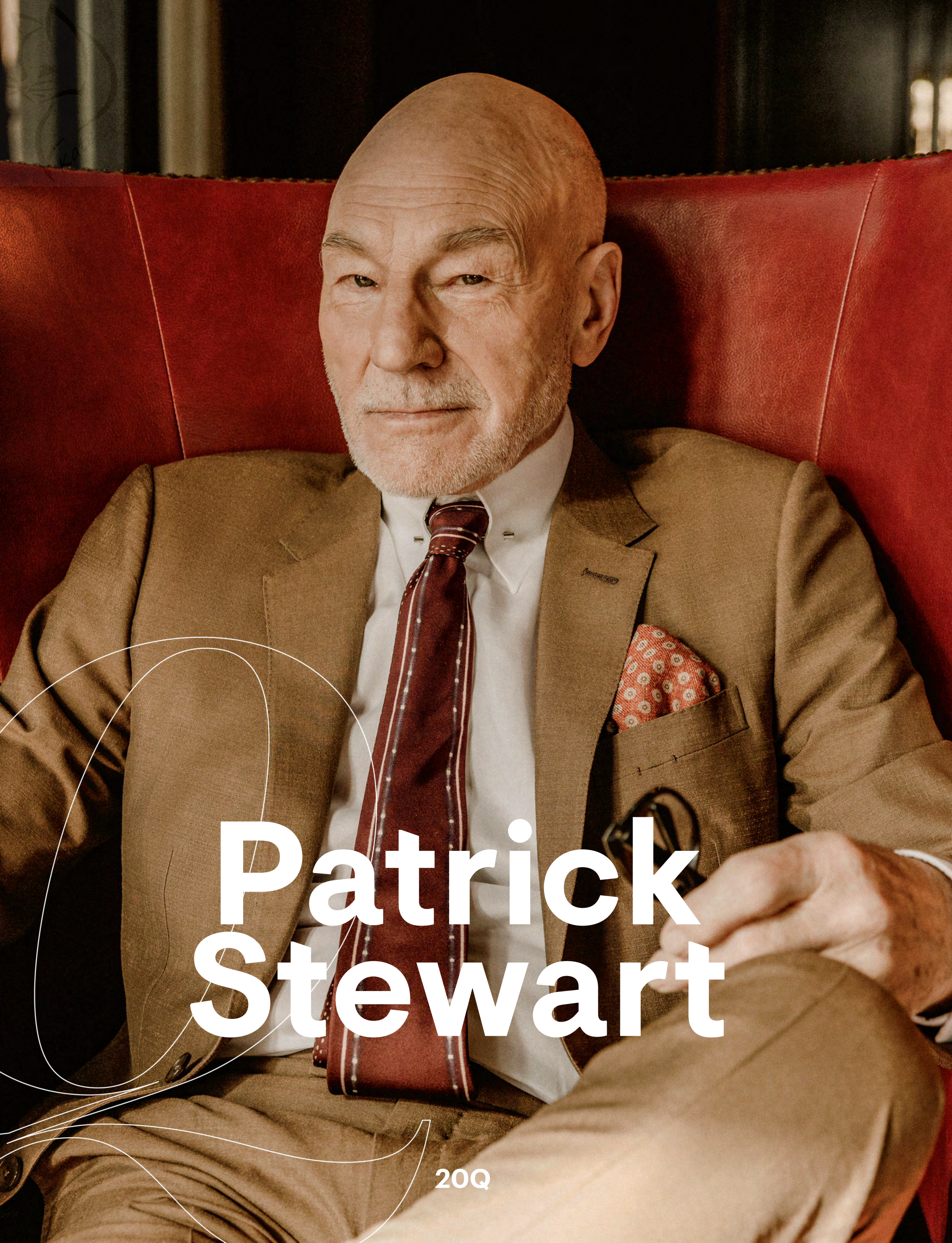




From left: May 2019 Playmate
Abigail O'Neill, April 2019
Playmate Fo Porter, October 2019
Playmate Hilda Dias Pimentel,
February 2019 Playmate Megan
Moore, June 2019 Playmate
Yoli Lara, March 2019 Playmate
Miki Hamano, September
2019 Playmate Sophie O'Neil,
January 2019 Playmate Vendela,
November 2019 Playmate Gillian
Chan, July 2019 Playmate Teela
LaRoux, August 2019 Playmate
Geena Rocero and December
2019 Playmate Jordy Murray.





A portrait of actor Patrick Stewart, an older man with a bald head and a light beard, sitting in a red leather armchair. He is wearing a brown suit jacket, a white shirt, and a red tie with white stripes. A red patterned pocket square is visible in his jacket. The background is dark and out of focus. The name 'Patrick Stewart' is overlaid in large white text, partially enclosed by a thin white line.

Patrick Stewart

20Q



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELIZABETH WEINBERG

With *Picard*, the *Star Trek* universe has rediscovered one of its brightest stars. The actor and activist (and knight) talks Hollywood inclusivity, cannabis reform, pit bull rescue and whether he'll ever say "Engage!" off camera

BY STACEY WILSON HUNT

Q1: *The internet arrived in earnest between Star Trek: The Next Generation and Star Trek: Picard. How have technology and social media changed your life and work?*

STEWART: I remember when iPhones first came out someone said, "Do you realize these are just like *Star Trek*?" [laughs] We used to have these things that we would talk on—or the other guys did. I just scratch the surface of what my phone can do; voice activation makes me uneasy. But we have access to CGI and special effects that are far more powerful than what we used to have. I hear about social media's hostile side, which I've encountered only once or twice. You can't comment about anything without attracting angry attention. That makes me uncomfortable.

Q2: *Isa Briones, an actress of Asian descent, and other nonwhite performers are central to Picard's narrative. Does a series like this, one not rooted in reality, still have a responsibility to reflect the real world?*

STEWART: I'm moved when I recollect [*Next Generation* co-star] Whoopi Goldberg telling me what it meant to her seeing the character Uhura on TV; what she said to me was, "One of us made it," which is partly ironic and a little cynical but nevertheless profound. Thankfully we are energetically acknowledging that there has always been a problem, and we're doing something about it. Five of our 10 episodes were directed by women,

and I continually find myself in scenes in which female cast members outnumber the male.

Q3: *What is it about the mythology of Star Trek, the original series of which started in 1966 and lasted only three seasons, that has allowed it to endure?*

STEWART: In part it returns me to Whoopi's comment. We live in a complicated world in which the need for care and concern for other members of society is much more potent than it ever was before. My wife and I went to Italy earlier this year: Florence, Bologna and Ravenna. I'd never reflected much on these cities, so when I saw they were *ancient* towns—not just a church here, an old building there—and still vibrant parts of Italian society, I was astonished. The connection between past and present was so strong. *Star Trek* offers this too. And the connection to Whoopi's comment is that it will get better. Though right now it doesn't feel like that.

Q4: *Novelist Michael Chabon is a writer on Picard. How is it different working with someone more used to the solitary act of book writing?*

STEWART: He is so smart, open and interested. His enthusiasm for the actor's technique and processes is genuine. Because I'm an executive producer, I had access to the writers' room. It was a privilege to hear them bouncing ideas around

in a way that actors and directors don't. One writer will take up an idea but change it into something else, and then another writer will change it again. I find it frustrating when they say, "No, that's not going to work," and move on to something else. [laughs]

Q5: *Picard is action-packed. What is it like doing stunts now that you're older?*

STEWART: Hell. I have a type of vertigo that hit me three years ago. I'm dizzy pretty much all the time, except when I'm sleeping or driving. Doctors say there's a disconnect between the signals my eyes and inner ear are sending to my brain. If I stand up quickly I might fall over, so I have to be careful on set. There's a scene in which Isa Briones and I run up a flight of stairs. They said, "We have a stunt double for you." I said, "Actually, let me give it a shot." I ran up the stairs and felt fine! I think when I'm acting, the dizziness goes away. Thank God.

Q6: *A slew of your Next Generation pals, including Brent Spiner and Jonathan Frakes, appear on Picard. Are you all still close?*

STEWART: Yes. We see each other all the time, though not Whoopi as often as I'd like. They're beautiful people. Casts are thrown together, and the nature of acting means you're exposing yourself, which is a great bonding agent. I recently reached out to someone I'd worked with in 1967 at the Royal Shakespeare Company. I'd heard he was living in Beverly Hills, and with my team's help, I made contact. His name is Sir Ben Kingsley. [laughs] Over the years we would wave and say hi—but as I reminded Ben, he actually slept on a mattress on my bedroom floor for several nights.

Q7: *Was there ever a point when you considered quitting acting?*

STEWART: Never, because I would be quitting my life. When I was acting as a child, I wasn't "Patrick Stewart." I was living somebody else's life, one that was better than mine. I have always felt safe onstage. As the years go by, what I love about this job is that I get braver about showing myself, letting it be personal and not just a "performance."

Q8: *Sir Ian McKellen is one of your closest*



I don't **know**
what happened.
I **swear** to you,
I was 40 about
six **months ago**.

friends and even officiated at your 2013 wedding. What have you learned from him?

STEWART: Gay men have played a part in my life as colleagues and friends, but none so significantly as Ian. I love him and I'm *in* love with him. So is my wife, and it's mutual. I listen to him, I watch what he does—and I don't mean just acting. How he lives his life is so admirable, selfless and compassionate. We also have a hell of a lot of fun.

Q9: *Around whom have you felt the most starstruck in your life?*

STEWART: We were at a Golden Globes party, and a woman with a strong accent came over and asked if I would take a photograph with her. You often have to say no; otherwise you'll be taking selfies all night. Then someone said, "Have you met Nadia before?" I said no. And he said, "This is [Olympic gymnast] Nadia Comaneci." I swear to you my knees almost gave way. I love athletics and sports, and there was Nadia, standing in front of me. It was thrilling.

Q10: *You've become an advocate for cannabis reform. What was your first experience with it, and when did this cause become so important to you?*

STEWART: Drugs played almost no part in my early years. I was around 40 years old before I had any experience with cannabis. What really did it was this [*rubs his hands*]. I have arthritis, so twice a day I use a cannabinoid-based cream, and wow, what a transformation! Another aspect: There was a limo driver my wife and I knew well in New York. We adored him. Then he got cancer and was dying. He stopped eating, watching TV, reading newspapers and talking on the phone. My wife got him some marijuana, and his family told us later that he lived longer than anticipated because he was leading a fuller life. He was eating and telling jokes. This profoundly affected me. Cannabis has medical properties that we've never fully explored. So yes, I'm a modest campaigner for the legalization of medical marijuana.

Q11: *You're also an outspoken supporter of women. Why have so few high-profile men shown similar support in the wake of the #MeToo movement?*

STEWART: Because I don't think they believe it. It's very hard for a lot of men, certainly those of a particular age or degree of success. The way male superiority has become part of our lives is very subtle and complicated. But it exists, and it's now changing—some think not quickly enough. I'm excited by what's happening around me and the impact it has on women's careers and self-respect.



Q12: When you were coming up in the theater and early on working in film and television, did you witness people being mistreated and think you should help, or was it something you accepted as part of the creative process?

STEWART: I don't think I could claim to have thought like that. I do know that when I went to drama school, I already knew what a casting couch was—at 17! There is predatory behavior everywhere. I had firsthand experience with that because of my mother's domestic abuse. That's why I became involved with Refuge in the U.K. It's a wonderful organization that helps combat domestic violence.

Q13: You've talked about wanting to become a United States citizen. How do you feel seeing both your native U.K. and the U.S. now in such tumult, culturally and politically?

STEWART: It's been creeping up on me of late that I feel guilty I'm not in England more. My whole life I've been involved in left-wing politics. I'm still a member of the Labour Party but have profound reservations about it now. I'm scared.

There's a movement toward nationalism in both countries, and one reason is economic and educational division. Boris Johnson and Donald Trump both appeal to people who have experienced deprivation. The gap between the rich and the poor, which is growing at a terrifying rate, and global warming are the things that alarm me most.

Q14: Changing gears, you and your wife, Sunny, live in Park Slope, Brooklyn. What were some of your first impressions of your new home?

STEWART: The people who live there are extraordinary. When I first stayed with Sunny at her place, we came out of her building on a summer Sunday morning and saw two guys sitting on a stoop, smoking. I saw one look up, and I didn't want an encounter. As I got abreast of them one of them said, [*in a New York accent*] "Hey, Mr. Stewart! Welcome to the neighborhood. Enjoy." That was it. No "Could I have a selfie?" I get emotional when I think about it, because I've never felt so welcomed, anywhere, in that way.

Q15: There's a 38-year age difference between you and Sunny. How does this figure, if at all, into your day-to-day lives?

STEWART: I'm learning so much from her. She remembers everything she reads, which has become formidable ever since she first visited me in London and encountered, in her words, "old shit." She's becoming an expert in late medieval-early Renaissance art and architecture. I walk into a church with her and know what's there because she's done the research. But do I think about our age difference? I'm afraid not very





much. I don't feel self-conscious about it. But it has happened in public when people say, "You and your daughter...." And I say, "Thank you very much." [laughs]

Q16: How did her family feel about your relationship?

STEWART: I don't think they were too sure at first. But in my wedding speech I said, "I want to clear up a rumor circulating that I married Sunny in order to be near her parents. It's totally true." [laughs] We get on so well and laugh so much. They have a cabin in Alpine Meadows, California. I learned to ski at the age of 64. I told her father, "I can't do this. Leave me with a fire, a book and a pot of coffee." He said, "We've booked a trainer to do four hours a day with you." At the end of day four, I nervously took the lift to the top of the mountain and skied down alone. It was thrilling. I've watched hours and hours of winter sports and suddenly I hear that noise [makes whooshing sound], and it was me making it!

Q17: What first drew you to the cause of animal rescue, and how has it changed you?

STEWART: It was the trust and the openness of the first dog we fostered, a pit bull named Ginger. I was upset about something I was reading in the newspaper—a daily occurrence—and she came and stood in front of me. With her eyes, she asked, "Are you okay?" A week later, I was sick and throwing up in our bathroom in Los Angeles. And she brought Sunny to me. How do you explain that? Pit bulls are our obsession, but we can't keep pit bulls because they're banned in England. I'm part of a campaign working to get that changed, because it's ludicrous. It's nothing to do with dogs; it's about the owners.

Q18: You turn 80 in July. How do you plan to mark this milestone?

STEWART: Sunny has been planning for months now. It will be celebrated in Los Angeles and maybe London too. I don't know what happened, because, I swear to you, I was 40 about six months ago. I remember it vividly. I was filming *Excalibur* with John Boorman, the director. I didn't get in front of the camera after sitting in full armor all day. I begged him, "It's my 40th birthday. Let me at least be a background person!" He wouldn't. So I feel blessed to be reasonably healthy, to be working, to be so busy, to have an incredible wife with a family that has kind of



become my family. I do occasionally get a little bit scared. It just doesn't make any sense to me how I got here.

Q19: When you did a *PLAYBOY* 20Q back in 1992, you said your five desert-island discs were three classical albums, a cast recording of *Sweeney Todd* and your friend Brent Spiner's *Ol' Yellow Eyes Is Back*. Have your tastes since changed?

STEWART: For the past 25 or 30 years, popular music wasn't in my life. Then I met Sunny, who plays it all the time. I've learned to love country music. I struggle with hip-hop. I'll never forget the first time I heard Sunny sing: I didn't know she was a singer, and then she said, "I have a gig." I didn't know what a gig was! She told me it was in the East Village and happening between 11 o'clock and midnight. *What?* I remember worrying, as the evening wore on, What if this is an open-mike night? Then she went onstage—after midnight. And that was it. Amazing. Wonderful.

Q20: Also in your last 20Q you vowed never to appear as Jean-Luc Picard in public or utter *Next Generation* catchphrases. Are you still as strict about such things?

STEWART: No, I've relaxed significantly about that. It would be weird—I mean really fucked-up—if I was still, "No, no, no, no, I won't say 'Engage!'" 

A stylized illustration of a mountain landscape. In the background, a large mountain with blue and white peaks rises against a pink sky with white wavy lines. In the middle ground, three pink elephants are visible behind a wooden fence. The elephants are surrounded by green foliage. In the foreground, a road with white dashed lines runs diagonally across the frame. The text "senator gardner, radical centrist" is overlaid on the image.

senator gardner,
radical **centrist**



Kate

WELCOME TO
GREENER
COLORADO

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MONICA GARWOOD



**Colorado's
Republican
statesman and
unexpected
cannabis-industry
darling is on the
run—from Trump's
legacy and,
often, his own**

BY **MATT LASLO**

There's a 6,000-square-foot cannabis dispensary—Euflora, the only pot shop along downtown Denver's pedestrian mall—I've been wanting to check out. But first I've got a holiday party to crash. Luckily the dispensary is a mere three-minute walk from the luxurious Brown Palace Hotel and Spa, which has hosted gold speculators, gunslinging gamblers and other colorful patrons since it opened in 1892. On this brisk evening, Colorado's junior U.S. senator has taken over one of its ballrooms.

Cory Gardner is a lawyer but not a three-piece-suit-wearing jackass. After working for his family's agricultural company in eastern Colorado and getting a law degree, he became a spokesperson for the National Corn Growers Association. Republicans tapped him in 2005 to fill a vacant seat in the Colorado House of Representatives. In 2011 he was wooed eastward for a four-year stint

self and all the principles he once professed to cherish.

Unlike many of his peers, Gardner, now 45, isn't a millionaire, though he occasionally lives like one. Tonight is one of those nights when it's perfectly legal, if unseemly, for him to use his Project West PAC to cover the tab for seemingly endless platters of beef Wellington, coconut shrimp and several offerings whose names I can't readily pronounce.

Besides a couple rocking matching BIKERS FOR TRUMP black leather vests, the room hums mostly with well-dressed donors, conservative activists and senior staffers. Down the hall, Gardner emerges from an elevator with his wife, Jaime, and their three children. He heartily greets me as if this weren't the third time I've seen him this December day.

He flashes his family a smile before encouraging them warmly, if absentmindedly, to head in without him. His wife responds with an honest frown. It appears she isn't happy being abandoned among this lot of power-hungry scavengers.

"Probably like three or four minutes," Gardner's communications director, Annalyse Keller, says of my last moments with the senator. This makes me both angry and nervous, but I'm not on the ballot.

Numerous local journalists have warned me that the senator avoids the press, and when you google "Cory Gardner reporters" the top hits include "dodges," "won't say" and "declines." His staff notoriously announces events with just hours' notice, claiming accessibility while screwing understaffed newsrooms left scrambling to cover him. After the senator went nearly 500 days without a town hall, fed-up activists sent a

in the U.S. House before finally capturing a Senate seat three years later. This November he's running for reelection, likely against former Democratic governor John Hickenlooper, whom an Emerson College survey gives a more than 10-point advantage.

But Donald Trump's advent has rendered almost all political scales obsolete. Six years ago Gardner captured one of the nation's last purple Senate seats by running as a "freethinker." Tides churned. Almost accidentally he now finds himself a Trumplican. On paper at least he has broken with the president on cannabis, immigration and foreign affairs, but his independent flashes are drowned out by loyalty to a party unrecognizable to his forebears. That makes Gardner's race feel more internal than external—almost as though he's running against his former

"Cardboard Cory" cutout on a statewide bus tour to meet with constituents. Democrats paint Gardner as a shorter Donald Trump. There's lots to discuss, but he's not eager to talk.

I was in two of Gardner's private meetings earlier, including one at a Denver passport office, which State Department employees wouldn't let me record. Later, my allotted 10-minute interview stretched to 15 after I hopped into Gardner's elevator. We talked about foreign policy because that was his focus. His staff even brought me to a gathering of the nation's top defense contractors and climate-denying Armed Services Committee chair Senator Jim Inhofe, who quietly informed these pillars of the military-industrial complex that their world is dependent on Gardner's election this fall. (*Wink wink*, cut the man a check already, was what I heard.)

Keller scooped me in the morning so I could ride with the senator between events, as I'd requested. That never happened, but for lunch, Keller and Jerrod Dobkin, communications director for Gardner's reelection campaign, spun me for about an hour.

Later it hits me: All they scheduled over my four days here were two private events and a brief interview. But PLAYBOY





flew me west to cover an issue that never came up at their handpicked meetings, which is why I'm now basically crashing a party his team never told me about.

"We haven't really talked about cannabis laws yet," I tell him in the ballroom.

"Yeah, yeah," Gardner, now donning a tie for the first time today, says, nodding.

The senator is prepared: Cannabis is his bipartisan thing. He's supposedly one of Washington's last pragmatists—or moderates, though he doesn't dare utter that *M* word in the Trump era. Gardner helped ease wholesale GOP opposition to marijuana after drafting the Strengthening the Tenth Amendment Through Entrusting States—or STATES—Act with Senator Elizabeth Warren in 2018. Like other proposals floating around the Hill, the legislation seeks to decriminalize cannabis federally, but it's unique in that it focuses on empowering states so they can decide their own marijuana policies once the fear of federal interference is removed. Some Democrats now distance themselves from it; they're demanding reparations, of sorts, for minority communities left ravaged by the war on drugs. To Gardner, his bill remains the only answer.

Although legalization is relatively new in Colorado, cannabis is no longer a novelty: Marijuana delivery is more sophisticated than pizza apps here. The roadblock for this burgeoning industry is federal prohibition. It's the reason heavily armed security is required to protect these all-cash operations that federally insured banks are required to shun.

Gardner's cannabis awakening came only after 55.32 percent of voters rejected his former prohibitionist stance and passed Colorado's revolutionary recreational cannabis law in 2012.

"Where are you on that personally now?" I ask.

"It's the STATES Act," Gardner replies.

"But what do you think about marijuana personally?" I press.

"The state should decide," Gardner says.

"Have you ever used it?" I ask, clawing for honesty.

"No, no," Gardner says, laughing. "You can quote that. I always thought people might use that against me."

He then dismisses my offer to try it with me.

• • •

For a decade I've witnessed Cory Gardner's evolution. His once-dark hair is now silver. As a House freshman, he earned an approval score of 82 percent from the Tea Party's Freedom-Works group. Then, as a senator in 2018, he backslid to 61 percent. Back in the House he was more conservative than independent, even supporting a fetal-personhood act—a position he conveniently disavowed in his Senate run.

After riding 2010's Tea Party wave to Washington, in 2014 Gardner ran for the Senate as a freethinker. In 2016, after the pussy-grabbing video surfaced, he "rescinded" his Trump endorsement, only to endorse him again at the start of 2019. Just as this is a new Republican Party, this is a new Cory Gardner.

Not many polls are out yet. Those that are reveal the thin reddish-purple line on which Gardner is tiptoeing. Keating Research found that an astonishing 90 percent of Colorado Republicans approve of Trump, while only 63 percent view Gardner favorably. Even as Democrats paint Gardner as a radical conservative, many Republicans consider him a sellout for deviating from Trump even once. With Gardner, it's always complicated.

Gardner is proud of Trump's judges—"I'm going to point to all the judges," he gushes over his 2020 campaign strategy—including two now on the Supreme Court. In 2018 he chaired

the National Republican Senatorial Committee and helped defeat centrist Democrats Claire McCaskill of Missouri and Joe Donnelly of Indiana. On climate change, he says humans are the culprits, but he has helped unwind environmental regulations. He worked with Democrats on immigration, then supported Trump's wall. The president is an isolationist, while Gardner wants engagement—though "Hillary Clinton opposed TPP," he says, defending Trump.

His political calculations, or lack thereof, have turned heads. Voters are wondering which Cory Gardner is on their ballots: Trump lapdog or centrist? He's played both parts well.

"Your brand is different than Trump," I tell Gardner.

"It is. That's right. Yeah," Gardner replies. "We ran in 2014 as a different kind of Republican, and that's exactly what we continue to be: optimistic, forward-looking, reaching out, finding solutions."

Gardner has had his moments. After then attorney general Jeff Sessions rescinded the Obama-era Department of Justice memo shielding most locally legal cannabis companies from federal enforcement, Gardner temporarily held up Justice Department nominees. Eventually he and Warren crafted the STATES Act, which garnered positive headlines for Gardner after Trump told reporters, as *Marine One* spewed dirt about the White House lawn, "I probably will end up supporting that, yes."

I hear "probably" because Trump is a pathological liar, at least according to fact-checkers. Gardner hears only "yes." Whether it's naivete or blind faith, he trusts Trump—even after he reversed himself on DREAMers, gun control, foreign policy and more.

"He said it to me on the phone, gosh, almost a year ago," Gardner says. "He said it to me in person many times since then."

Trump told reporters "probably" in June 2018. Some two years later, not even a tweet, even though federal prohibition has now been rejected by 33 states, the District of Columbia, four territories and some Native American tribes. As a good Republican, Gardner blames Obama: "If this was so important to them, they would have done something."

Even as he embraces such tired conservative talking points, there's an obvious disconnect between Gardner and today's GOP. That's why I'm chasing this flustered senator who remains proud of his conservative record but runs from reporters. It appears Gardner doesn't want to discuss Trump lest he mess up and say what 2016 Gardner was thinking when he rescinded his endorsement of the self-proclaimed groper in chief. In 2014 and 2016 he stood out—but after facing conservative fire, 2020 Gardner is tied to Trump. Or so his opponents think.

• • •

By some metrics, Gardner's style is effective. The Lugar Center named him the fifth-most-bipartisan senator in the 115th Congress. Trump relocated the Bureau of Land Management to Colorado and, at least temporarily, housed U.S. Space Command here. Democrats say those are prepackaged gifts from the administration meant to divert attention from Gardner's record since Trump took office.

"I understand why they're frustrated," Gardner says. "They wanted me to be the old fuddy-dud Republican, and unfortunately, what they've seen is somebody who's effective at getting things done. I get why they're angry."

Democrats can't fathom why Gardner isn't angry. While the senator is rhetorically tough as hell on Russia and North Korea, Trump praises their oppressive leaders. If he's tried, Gardner



hasn't moved Republicans on climate change or immigration. Trump has also delivered nothing on cannabis—private assurances don't count. (Neither the White House nor members of Trump's campaign responded to numerous offers for the president to weigh in.) Of course, Democrats bitch about any Republican who has assisted Trump, especially those, like Gardner, who voted to kill Obamacare while supporting massive tax cuts. But his story is more complex.

"Compassionate conservatism" was a recent GOP mantra, but that makeover began to fade even before Trump started wielding sledgehammer-style conservatism. That's why, at least compared with Trump's rebranded GOP, Gardner looked angelic for co-sponsoring the Dream Act.

"He stuck his neck out, and I appreciated it," Dick Durbin, the number two Senate Democrat, tells *PLAYBOY*. "It wasn't an easy call in the age of Donald Trump. In my world, it stands tall."

• • •

Gardner also receives praise from the cannabis industry, which becomes evident minutes into a private tour of an expansive cannabis grow in Aurora, Colorado.

As I enter the dispensary at this Terrapin Care Station (one of six), the Cheech and Chong tropes dissipate. Its warm wooden floors lend a ski-lodge ambience, and the polished display cases alert visitors that cannabis is taken seriously here. Exotic offerings abound, including Live Nectar, a crystal-like amber substance that burns more smoothly than the hundreds of joints nearby, the latter expertly labeled so users know whether they're sparking, say, a PBR or a Jameson. There is also a variety of gummies, jellies, tinctures and even THC bath salts that promise a body buzz.

Past the dispensary, Terrapin founder and CEO Chris Woods—wearing jeans, a white button-down shirt and a purple plaid sports coat—plays tour guide. As I head through the secure doors, my nostrils dance from the sweet, pugnacious aroma emanating from roughly 3,000 plants. The 35,000-square-foot facility is fitted with 216 natural lights that encourage the plants to pump out roughly 350 to 400 pounds of sticky buds monthly.

Each plant has a unique RFID tag that eventually matches the label on the products that consumers purchase, enabling health officials to trace any contaminants. One room boasts an elaborate lab where employees in blue coats and rubber gloves—along with hair and beard nets—show off vials of liquid THC and petri dishes brimming with pure THC crystals that are, except for their enticing golden glow, oddly reminiscent of crack rocks.

Around 3,000 similar, if mostly less elaborate, licensed marijuana businesses dot the state. The industry has witnessed more than \$7 billion in sales over six years, reaping \$1 billion in state revenue. According to my host, Cory Gardner deserves credit.

"It could very well have been the case that this industry would not exist how it is today if it weren't for Cory," Woods says.

Woods doesn't like politicians, but Gardner won his respect for battling Sessions. And Peter Marcus, Terrapin's communications director, says Gardner's mark is industry-wide.

"As a Republican standing up, pounding the dais, saying, 'I will not let these nominations go through until you respect states' rights'—those are the major talking points for the industry that you wouldn't necessarily have gotten had it been a Democrat who you expected to obviously stand up and be good on marijuana," Marcus says.

In a past life as a reporter, Marcus covered Gardner. He says numerous entities endorsed cannabis proposals after Gardner's outspoken advocacy provided cover. To him, Gardner is "a guy who's been on the wrong side of liberal issues for his entire time as a politician, going back to the statehouse. That was what was significant about it: the headlines generated from this specific man taking this to the people like that."

But even with praise coming from some surprising voices, Gardner is still saddled with a Trump-size problem.

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On a Tuesday morning in December, three days before the Brown Palace event, more than a dozen reporters—cameras, note pads and recorders in tow—huddled outside the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Inside, senators examined "The Future of U.S. Policy Towards Russia." In the past it would have been a staid, bipartisan event, but in Trump's Washington, formerly innocuous hearings generate headlines. This was evident when Mitt Romney of Utah, the 2012 GOP presidential nominee who has remained critical of Trump, made news for breaking with the president by saying—*gasp!*—he agreed with the nation's 17 intelligence agencies and blamed Russia, not Ukraine, for election meddling.

In between Romney and Ron Johnson, Republican of Wisconsin, sat Gardner. During the hearing he joked with both men, who represent opposite wings of today's GOP. Addressing the issue at hand, he sounded more like a classic GOP hawk than this new breed of Trump-before-all-else pols. So instead of pivoting to the middle, as Romney has, or putting his head in Trump's crotch, where Johnson's head seems to rest these days, Gardner went old school—think Iron Curtain Reagan Republican—and accused Russia of being a state sponsor of terrorism.

That's where Gardner stands out: He's constantly trying to appease moderates without alienating Trump's base. But at least for now, Trumpism has killed conservatism. That may explain why Gardner hurried into the hall after asking questions that felt out of place in Trump's Washington.

"It's always good to continue the pressure," a quick-paced Gardner told me through a nervous smile. A moment later he asked, "I went the wrong way, didn't I?"

"No," a staffer intoned.

True to form, at least these days, Gardner was hurried, running when he didn't have to. He knows Trump has transformed the GOP in his own image, shrinking its tent to such a degree that some prominent traditional conservatives no longer feel at home there. I ask him, as he has labored to carve out his own perch in this new GOP, if he has ever felt out of place.

"No, not at all," Gardner says. "I'm a Republican. I believe in getting government out of the way."

Gardner has battle scars from crawling in Trump's trenches, along with some nicks from crossing him. As the senator prepares for what may be the fight of his career, the very commander for whom he has sacrificed so much—his brand, his identity and, some say, his integrity—is the one he must fear the most. But it's impossible to distance yourself from someone like Trump, especially after being his mostly reliable rubber stamp. That's why, whether Gardner likes it or not, Colorado voters will be presented one choice in November: Vote for or against Trump. In Gardner's case, just as in the case of leaders in other battleground states, no matter how fast or how far he runs, he can't erase four years of Trump from voters' minds.

Even if, at times, it's what he desperately longs to do.





"Have you been avoiding me?"



TICKET TO RIDE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
GRAHAM DUNN



MAY PLAYMATE



May Playmate Savannah Smith is equal parts model and grease monkey—and living proof that such distinctions are irrelevant. Join her as she demonstrates the richness of human endeavor and a passion for using her platform

As a recreational mechanic, I wouldn't advise changing your brake pads without gloves on...but oddly enough I feel entirely in my element posing nude in an auto body shop.

To me, this photo shoot illustrates the duality of my personality. There's my soft, feminine side, and there's my boyish side that loves working on cars and used to play rugby and chop down trees.

I grew up in a hippie town outside Athens, Georgia. We lived in the woods in a house my dad bought when he was 24. He was a cameraman and field producer for a hunting and fishing show, and my brother and I were homeschooled so we could travel with him on the job. I didn't like homeschooling at first—I remember thinking, Dang, I wish I had the experience of being with a big pack of kids—but in hindsight I'm grateful for the independence it afforded me. Without the pressure of being a cookie-cutter high school kid I was able to become the self-possessed person I am today. In fact, I was such a strong-willed child that my mom's friends used to joke, "You need to put her in boarding school!" to which my mom always responded, "I am *never* going to tell her to not be this way. No matter what, nobody's going to be able to boss her around."

It turns out my mom was right: The moment I set my mind on modeling as my profession there was no convincing me otherwise. Because my dad was a cameraman, I wanted to model from an early age. Starting at about four years old I would dress in themed outfits and give him art direction ("Take my picture *here!*"). I used to beg my parents to take me to auditions. They supported the idea, but they didn't think of modeling as a real

full-time career path. So when I was 19, I googled *open casting calls in Atlanta* and drove myself to the city without telling anybody. I signed with my first agency that day.

After a few years, I started to feel conflicted about modeling. I struggled with the idea of working in an industry that was by its nature self-serving. But then there was a huge shift when Trump got elected and the #MeToo movement took off. It's like the pendulum swung the other way, and instead of being silent, everyone in the industry became empowered to use their voices. A switch went off in my head, and I realized that modeling could give me a platform to reach people and talk about the issues I'm passionate about. So I freaking love it now!

My goal moving forward is to keep building my platform and using my resources to empower and enrich young lives. I was a preschool teacher for four years, and whether or not those kids remember me now, my mission was to show each child they were loved, respected and, most important, heard. I believe the reason I've always felt empowered is that I had people who really listened to me as a child and showed me my opinion was valued. You have your whole life to learn new things, but you can't re-create a happy childhood—and those missed opportunities contribute to our broken system.

I want to use my voice to help prompt a dialogue within society and within families. I want to combat voices that bring down self-esteem and capitalize on shame. I want to help build a world where connection and empathy are the currency of success.

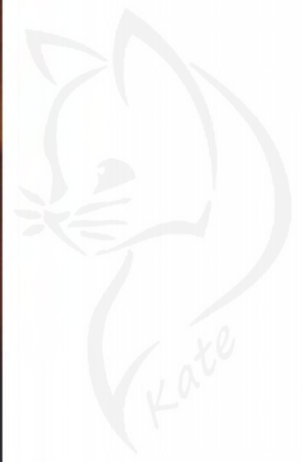
And at some point along the way I'd love to become a new-wave Martha Stewart with a Jeep Wagoneer.













DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE: Winder, Georgia **CURRENT CITY:** New York City, New York

ON EMOTION

I've always been emotional, and I think as a child I didn't know how to process those deep feelings. If I saw somebody sitting alone in a restaurant, it would keep me up at night. I found out Santa Claus wasn't real because I kept asking my parents, "Why do some kids not get the same amount of stuff as me?"

ON GUILTY PLEASURES

My guilty pleasure is going completely off the radar—taking a day to myself and doing absolutely nothing. This doesn't mean a bath and a facial; it means I truly do *nothing*—not even respond to text messages. Sometimes you just need a day to be a full-blown potato.

ON HOPE

It's hard not to be negative about the political climate we're in, but I also feel extremely hopeful. Maybe I live in a bubble, but my bubble is full of passionate

people who are exercising their rights to get out there and make change.

ON PET PEEVES

Constant complaining. I don't mind when people vent to me, but I have a real issue with somebody who's constantly like *womp-womp*. Of course there will always be things to complain about, but why not choose a different thought?

ON COMING PREPARED

What's in my bag? So many things. I have four or five crystals, a jade roller, a heated neck pillow, sparkling water, rosewater and a figurine of a baby angel. It makes me laugh when I'm searching in my bag for my wallet and think, Oh look, a tiny angel!

ON LIT LOVE

I'm reading Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime* because I'm halfway in love with him.

ON EARWORMS

"Just Like Heaven" by the Cure is always stuck in my head—and somebody played it on set! It must be fate.

ON ROLE MODELS

I'm obsessed with Jameela Jamil. I started out watching her on *The Good Place*, and then I found her Instagram and just dug in. I'm really inspired by how she uses her platform to create something that's much bigger than her career. I'm a huge Michelle Obama fan too. She radiates positivity; I live by her quote "When they go low, we go high." And I freaking love Oprah.

ON POWERPUFF GOALS

Last year I made my boyfriend a Mojo Jojo costume, and my two best friends and I were the Powerpuff Girls. I was Bubbles. Yeah, I'm Bubbles through and through. We're both the epitome of crying at the club.

Savannah Joy Smith





MAY 2020 PLAYMATE





Maddy Soria

MAY 2020 PLAYMATE



back *to* kali

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA TRIPPE



**What happens
when an artist tosses
the pop-star rule
book in favor of
fierce authenticity?
Kali Uchis is
ready to find out**

BY **EVE BARLOW**

Kali Uchis does not like to be the center of attention. Our original lunchtime table wasn't in an open part of the restaurant, but she still preferred to move to a spot in the corner. Now nestled between two walls, she's protected and able to keep out of the way. She excuses herself for being shy with a nymph-like laugh.

At the age of 25, Uchis is often unsure of herself, but her brutal determination keeps her moving forward. She's hard to miss, dressed for the roller rink in blue denim and a vintage long-sleeve T-shirt. Her lashes are extended, her lips are plumped and her nails form miniature Perspex daggers. Her hair is a wig.

"I just throw it on and then I'm done with hair!" she says.

The restaurant is in Studio City, which—like Uchis—is a bit of an outlier in Los Angeles. It's not *Valley* Valley; it's not Hollywood either. But if you know your *chūtoro* from your *ōtoro*, you know that Sushi Katsu-Ya is worth the trek. Uchis knows. She's a pescatarian, and she orders a baked crab hand roll that she manages to wrap her mouth around without ruining a smidgen of lip gloss. She talks fast and loose. She drinks hot tea. She spills a lot of it too.

When she put out her jazz-inflected neo-R&B album *Isolation* in 2018, Uchis received near-universal praise for her loner anthems. She collaborated with Tyler, the Creator; Damon Albarn; Steve Lacy; even Bootsy Collins. In interviews, however, journalists failed to get a read on her. An article in *The Fader* asked, WHO IS THE REAL KALI UCHIS? Today, in the first week of 2020—a year in which she'll release a new album (in the spring) and star in a movie (*Blast Beat*) that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival—it's becoming clearer who she is. She's someone who's finding her roots, someone who's taking the reins of her creativity, someone who's more accountable for her actions. Someone who means business.

"I been working," she says of the Christmas break. "It was hard for me when the new year started, because we went into a weekend. Do I *not* e-mail people that day?" She smiles warmly and shrugs. Last year was rough; Uchis was eager to wipe the slate clean.

"A lot of fucked-up shit happened in 2019—technically two weeks ago, but I'm gonna leave it back there."

Personal or work?

"Um, a lot of personal stuff." She goes quiet. Over miso soup and popcorn shrimp it becomes obvious that some wounds are too fresh to be exposed.

"In 2020 I'm trying to move from a place of love," she says. "Be myself. I worked out the things I needed to at the end of 2019. I could bring in the new year knowing what I know."

• • •

The past year wasn't all bad. Uchis bought a house in a neighborhood a little deeper into the Valley.

"Growing up, I never had a safe space to be myself," she says. "My main dream was to be able to not ask anyone for shit—to take care of myself."

Kali Uchis grew up Karly-Marina Loaiza between Virginia and Colombia. She has three brothers and an older sister, and when they were little their house in Virginia was a safe space for immigrant cousins en route to their own American dreams. She shared her room with female relatives who passed through.

It wasn't a happy childhood. "The way my family communicates with each other can be really aggressive," she says. She learned how to defend herself. "People in school and my family were always making smart remarks about me. You learn how to have tough skin. You learn how to be combative."

In school, Uchis was a "super band nerd," playing piano and saxophone. She was quiet and escaped public speaking by ditching school. She wrote stories. She made clothes. To this day she wants to be a movie director; she's always writing plots. "Anything I could do in the creative process made me feel like I could escape my situation," she says. "From the moment I got my first job I was really good at saving my money."

At 15, Uchis began working odd jobs. She worked at a grocery store. She waited at a Mexican restaurant. Her last retail job was as a cashier. "All my friends were going out partying. I was paying bills."

At the low point of a long-strained relationship with her parents, Uchis, then 17, was cast out of the house and had to live in a parking lot in her Subaru. Soon thereafter she made her first mixtape, *Drunken Babble*, on GarageBand, debuting the results on a free download site in 2012. The internet was impressed—so



impressed that the DIY swirl of samples, soul and synth-laden rap caught the attention of Diplo and Kaytranada, who helped her produce her first studio EP, 2015's *Por Vida*.

A North American tour led to a record deal with Virgin EMI, which led to *Isolation* in 2018, which led to a Grammy nomination. But her nascent stardom wasn't enough to heal her wounds.

"I was self-destructive in my career," she admits. "I'm opinionated. I fight with people online." Even with her increased visibility, Uchis took everything personally, as she had in her youth. "Being a public figure is being constantly up for display. It can really fuck with your mental health." (She contends that record labels should pay for their artists' therapy.) She has come to an important conclusion: "Criticism and flattery are the same thing. As long as people are talking about you, that's all that matters."

In 2017, Uchis came under fire for comments she made on Twitter, lashing out at critics who had accused her of manipulating her image to capitalize on her brownness. (The controversy stemmed from tweets that compared her differing looks on the cover of *Por Vida* and a promotional photo for the album.) She maintains she never intended to hurt anyone but admits she attacked people on bad days because it was her only vehicle for venting.

After the clash, she took a lengthy Twitter break. "It fucked me up," she says. She was too sensitive to be online. "Sometimes I just don't want to be fucking looked at."

Uchis went to therapy for the first time after her summer tour. She says she's never had a consistent support group: "I literally didn't have anyone to talk to. I'd never objected to a therapist. It's just that they're very expensive. It came to a point where I was like, 'You know what? I want my mental health to improve.'"

Mental health issues run in her family: schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression.

"A lot of family members have killed themselves, killed other people, been abusers, been abused, all types of ways," she says. "When you have that embedded in your DNA it can take a while to learn how to cope with it on a daily basis."

There is one guaranteed source of catharsis: performing on stage. Last year, touring with Jorja Smith, Uchis covered Radiohead's "Creep." It's a hypersexual rendition—more sensual than art rock. She's well-versed in Radiohead's catalogue, and she chose to cover the song because it's about being unloved. "It's a song for people who feel like they don't fit in—that's the story of my life."

She listened to "Creep" a lot in high school, around the time her niece, only seven months old, suddenly and tragically died. When Uchis talks about death she seems to disassociate. Her face goes blank. "I've lost a lot of people," she says. "I cried a few times when singing 'Creep.'"

Again she shrugs over the popcorn shrimp. "I'm not a big crier."

• • •

Once she settled into her new house last summer, Uchis decamped to Miami to work with producer Tainy, whose recent clients include reggaetón megastars Bad Bunny and J Balvin.

"I always wanted my second album to be predominantly in Spanish," she says. But she's not looking to replicate the successes of Balvin, Rosalía or others setting the *Billboard* charts ablaze with Spanish-language hits. "I love them, but our experiences are different," she says.

Her experience is rooted in a childhood spent boomer-ang between two continents. Uchis went to school in Colombia for three years and made sure to visit there annually after relocating to the United States. (Her parents still live in Colombia.) She attended T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia, which is nearly 80 percent minority. "We had a big Latino community, though not Colombian," she says.

She knew other Latino kids in Virginia who'd never visited their origin country and didn't speak Spanish. "They would be bullied if they were fresh off the boat. That's what they'd call you—an FOB," she says. "It's beautiful that people are now embracing those coming straight from our countries. That's part of what I wanted to do—capture that pride. I live in the U.S., but that doesn't mean my culture has to be washed away."

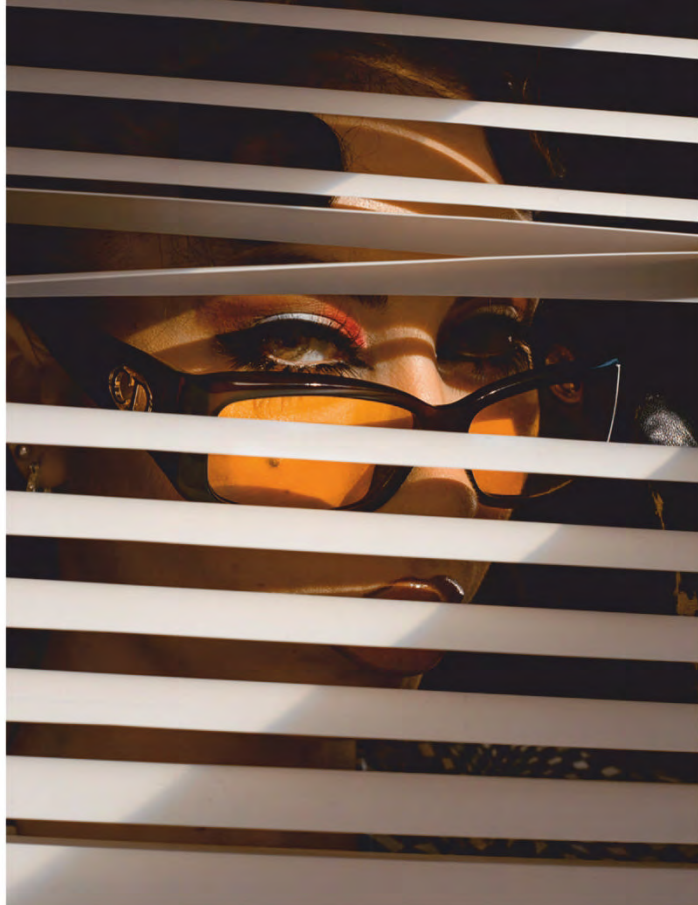
This new, as-yet-unnamed album is in Spanglish and was cranked out in one "super inspired" week. Her rise didn't



“

When I'm **dead** I want
to be remembered in a
positive way, but while
I'm here I don't mind
being **misunderstood.**”





create second-album paralysis; if anything, Uchis feels liberated by success.

"I'm going back to how I used to write when I started," she says. "People might think I feel more pressure, but it's the opposite. Your first album is how you get your foot on your world. Now that's over I can do whatever I want."

Her first single, "Solita," released late last year, chimes with that sentiment. "*Solita, solita/Bailando aquí sola/Es mejor que con el diablo*" translates as "Alone, alone, dancing here alone is better than dancing with the devil."

• • •

Uchis offers few other details about the album but does play me five unfinished tracks after our meeting. Even if they're incomplete and untitled, they prove she's doing what she wants regardless of the success of *Isolation* and the stratospheric rise of Spanish-language music on the charts. Uchis's music is still in its own scintillating corner—a little moodier, a little slower, a little hotter. The tracks are hypnotic; listening to them is like being drenched in billows of intoxicating smoke. In one of them she sings, "I got what you need, I know what you like."

She explains that the record jumps between genres and moods: Some songs are vulnerable, some sexy, some sad, some empowered. "It takes me by surprise when people say, 'I like your confidence,'" she says. "I never felt like a confident person."

Clearly she projects confidence into her songs, manifesting the self-worth she seeks. I wonder aloud what fuels that ability when she's having a bad day.

She thinks. Uchis can't remember exactly when it happened, but when she was younger she became wise to other people's toxicity.

"People can infect and train you in ways that deteriorate your self-esteem. They make you feel like you're worthless," she says. "Everything in my life is what I accept. The things that I've been through, I don't let them define me. That's an important part of life if you want to move forward and be better than you were yesterday."

Ingrained sexism is something she's had to overcome too. "There's a pedestal you should put yourself on in order to tell the world, 'I only accept this type of treatment from my friends, lovers, family,'" she says. "If you don't want to interact with me like I'm a queen, then you don't have to be in my life." This mentality has caused her to lose a lot of friends—and family. "It's tough. I'm a Cancer. I want to be a family-oriented person, but they keep doing stuff to piss me off!" She giggles and breathes a sigh of relief. "I'm so much happier than I used to be."

Her heroes are misunderstood figures, particularly female ones: Eartha Kitt, Amy Winehouse, Erykah Badu. Growing up she had few women in her life to admire (her elder sister was in foster care), so she looked to *Resident Evil* and *Kill Bill* for icons ("Women who were kicking ass!"). Consider that list of heroines: If any of them had paid too much attention to how they were perceived, it would have detracted from their power too.

"In a perfect world I would want people to see me the way I see myself," she says. "I can be hard on myself, but I know I'm a good person. I don't need people to see that about me. When I'm dead I want to be remembered in a positive way, but while I'm here I don't mind being misunderstood."

She continues to ponder her legacy, as though life could end at any moment. "I would like to be remembered for being...." She flutters her lashes. "Iconic? And imperfect."

Most of the time she wants to hide in the corner. "If someone told me this would be my future, I'd think they were talking about a whole different person. You have to have good people skills, and I don't."

I disagree.

"I'm having a good day today," she says, smiling. "But if you had asked the wrong question.... I've had interviews where the person would have walked away thinking, This girl's such a bitch. If other people had been through half of what I've been through, they would have quit."

Before she goes, I ask which part of her new home is her favorite. The enthusiastic reply: the recording studio.

"I got a lot of pillows and plushy toys," she says. "My studio is like a little girl's room—all pink. When I go to make music I want it to feel like I'm back home in my dream room that I never got to have."

She grabs her Louis Vuitton and dabs on some more lip gloss before offering an embrace.

"I'm trying to rebuild my childhood."





SF SX: THE DIRTY MIND

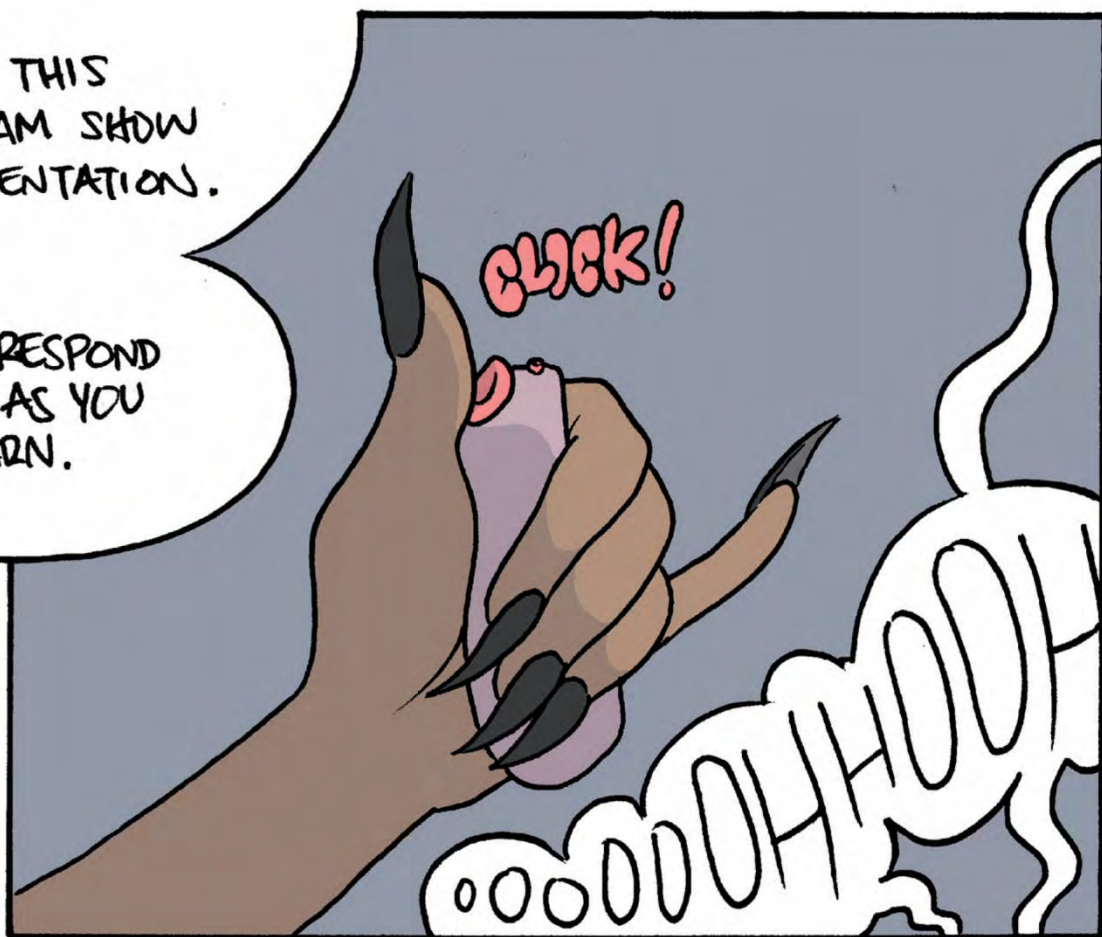
GUIDE 2 TALKING DIRTY





I DESIGNED THIS
LITTLE HOLOGRAM SHOW
FOR OUR PRESENTATION.

IT'LL RESPOND
TO YOU AS YOU
LEARN.



click!

000000



ARMS

LEGS

LET'S START WITH ANATOMY
WORDS. WHAT ARE SOME OF
YOUR FAVORITES?

TITS

WAIST
HIPS

ONCE YOU KNOW WHAT WORDS
YOU LIKE TO DESCRIBE
YOUR OWN BODY, YOU
CAN REFER TO
YOURSELF THAT
WAY. WHEN I
SAY "STROKE
MY COCK-

IF SOMEONE SAYS,
"I WANT YOU IN
MY HOLE RIGHT
THE FUCK NOW..."

-JUST LIKE THAT," IT
SIGNALS TO MY
PARTNER THAT THESE
WORDS TURN ME ON AND
I FEEL AFFIRMED BY THEM.

THEN YOU CAN RESPOND
WITH SOMETHING LIKE
"YOUR HOLE LOOKS
SO HUNGRY!"

WET

SEX IS ALL ABOUT ACTION.
SO LET'S TAKE A STROLL
THROUGH THE DIRTY MIND
TO EXPLORE SOME OF
OUR FAVORITE VERBS!

I REALLY LOVE
THE WAY YOU
Slobber ALL
OVER MY TITS.

FUCK
ME!

HARD!

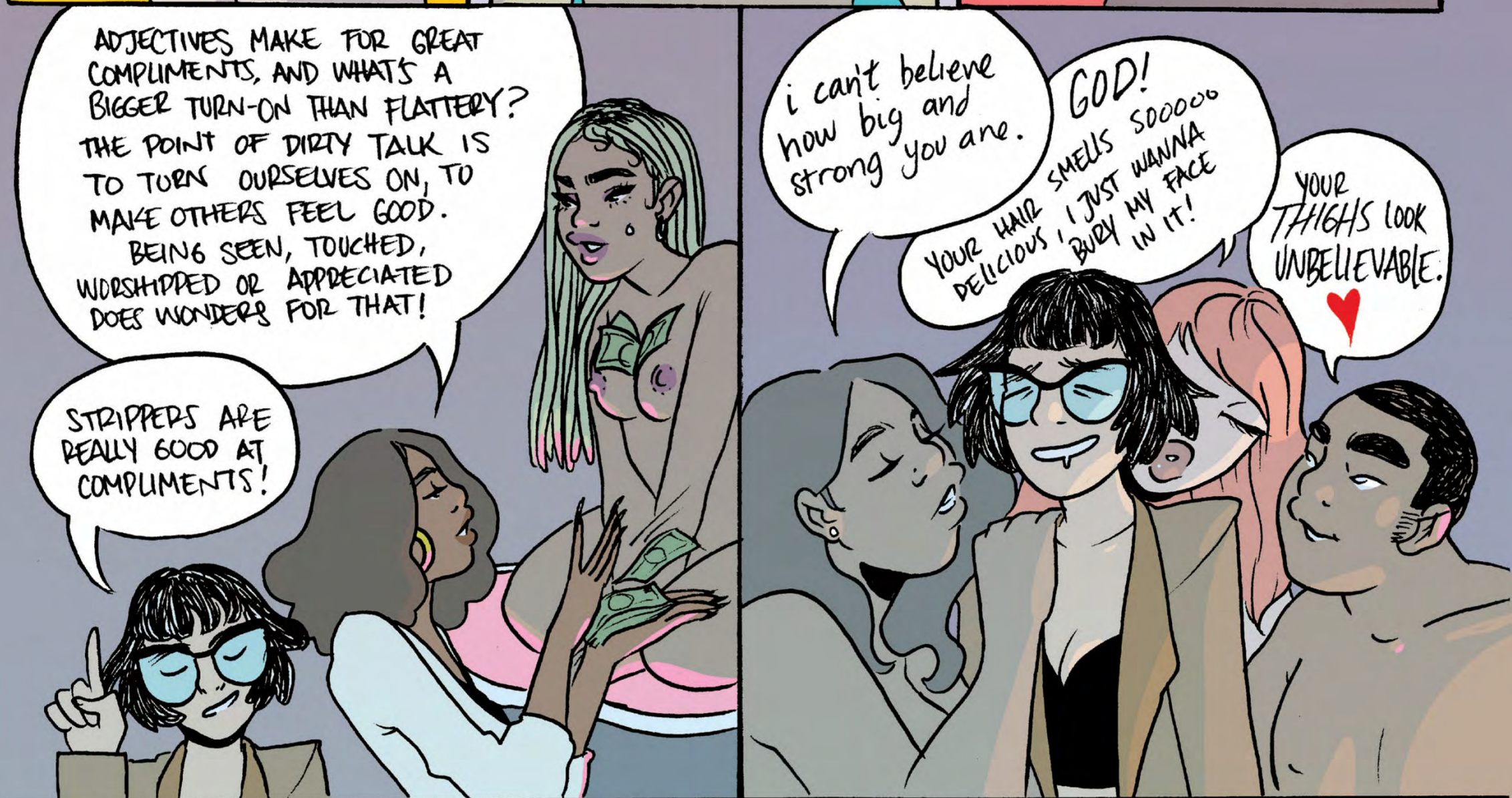
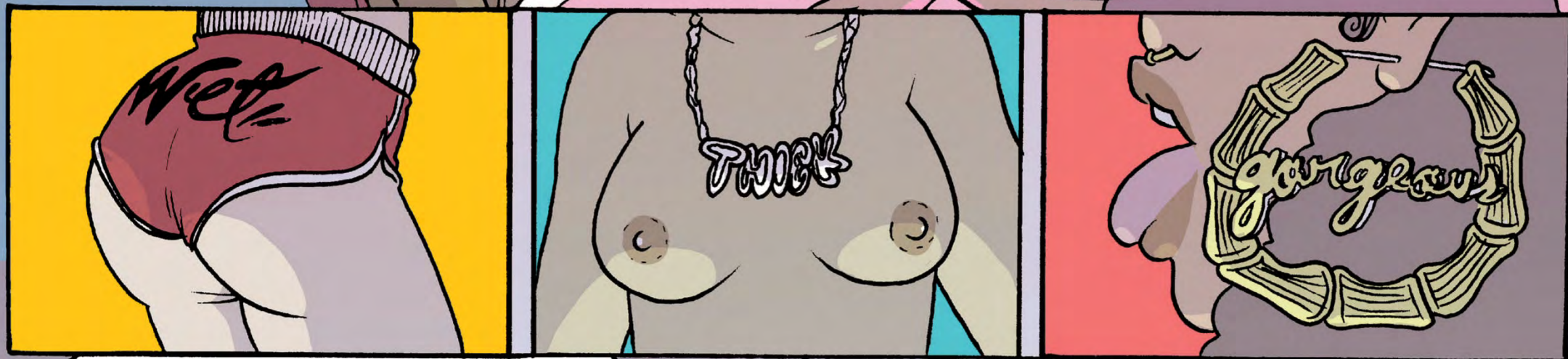
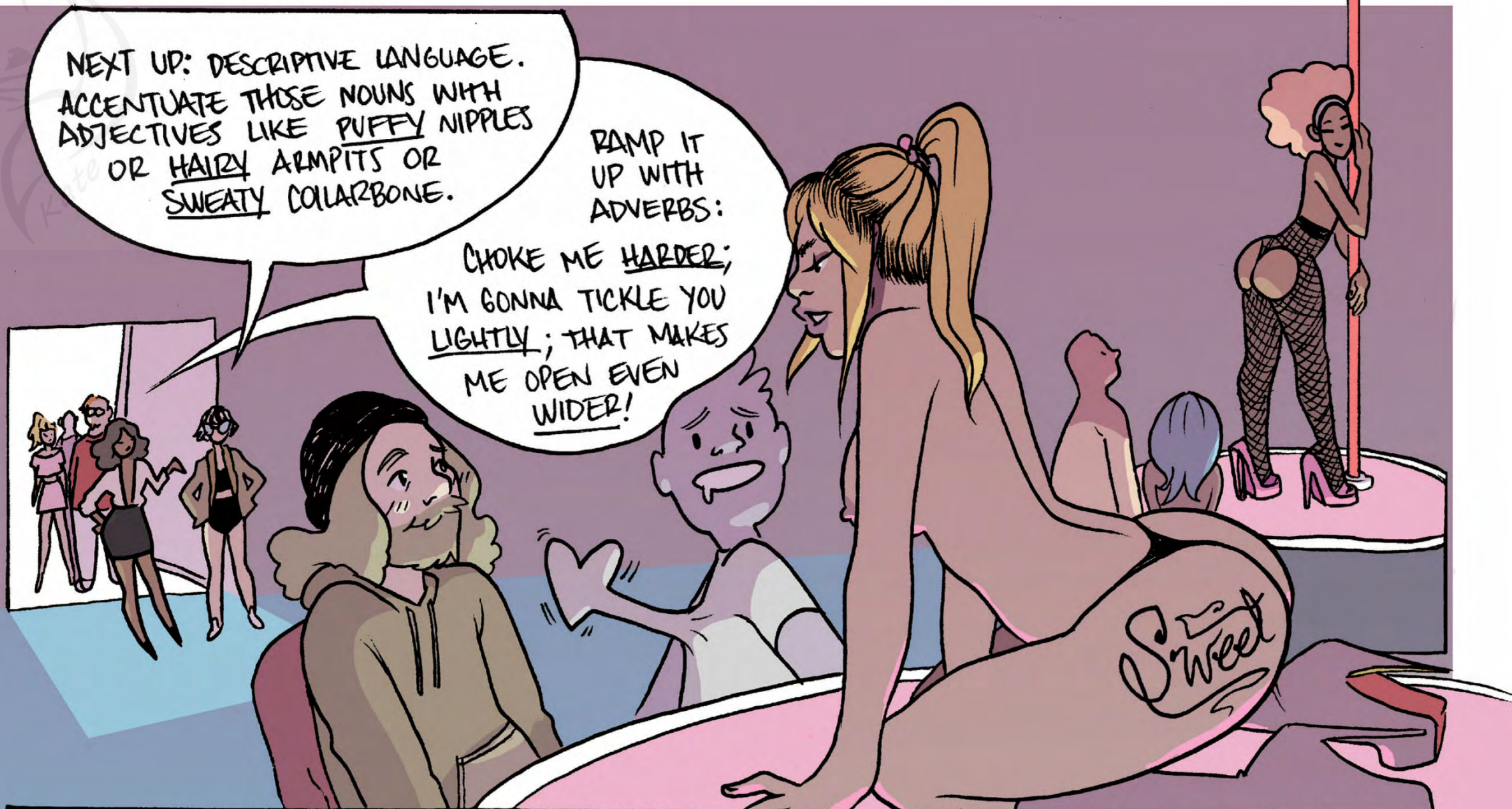
YOU CAN USE THESE
WORDS AS COMMANDS,
LIKE "POUND ME RIGHT
THIS SECOND, DADDY" OR
"LICK BETWEEN MY TOES!"

UH!
YEAH, YOU LIKE
IT WHEN I
SPANK YOU,
DON'T YOU, YOU
LITTLE SLUT?

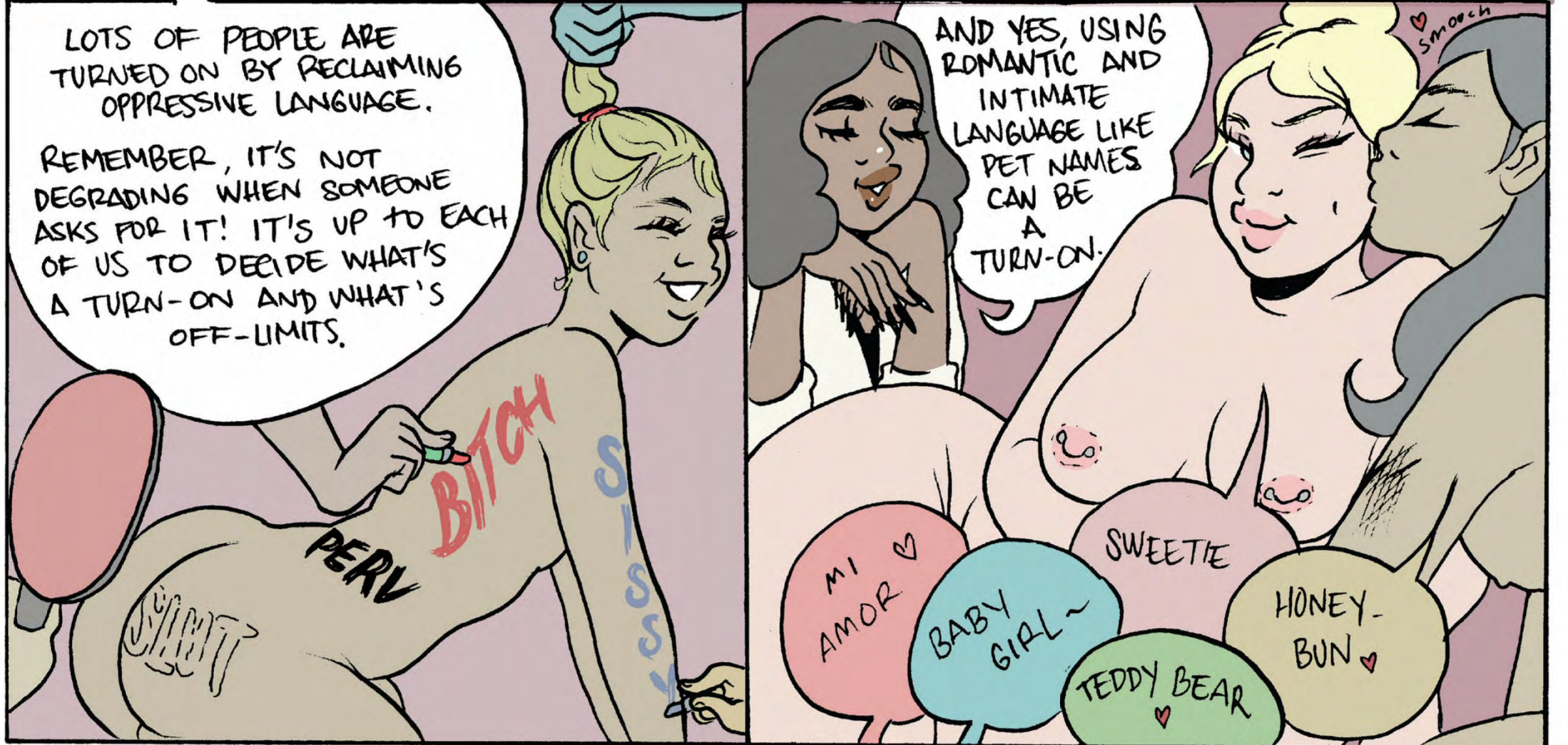
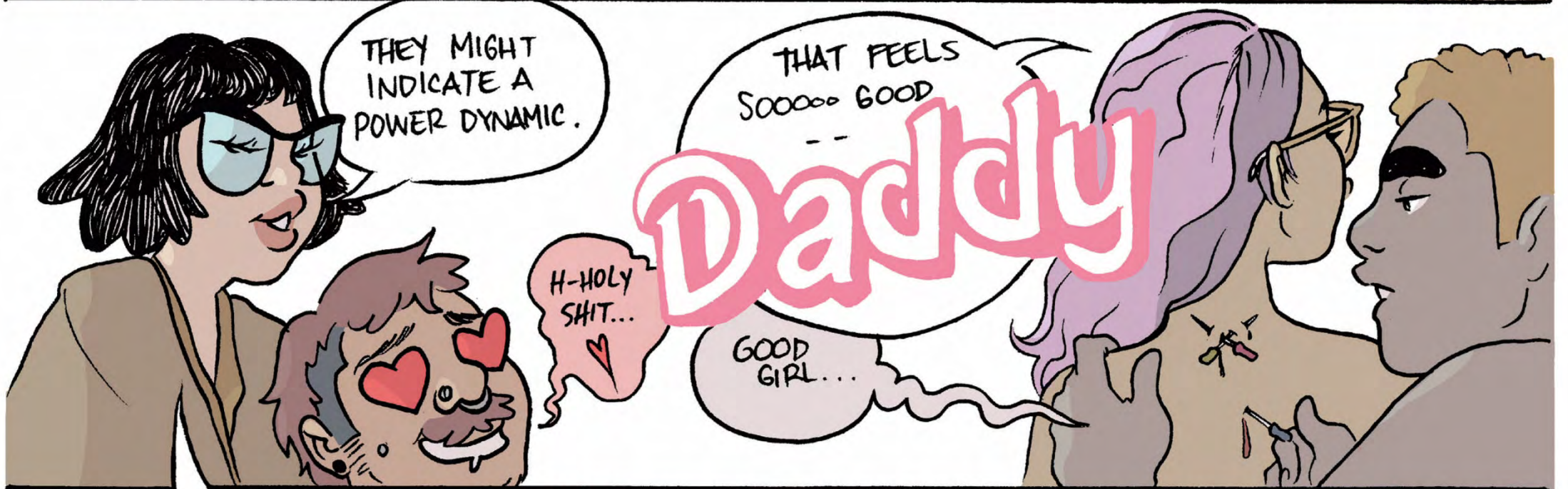
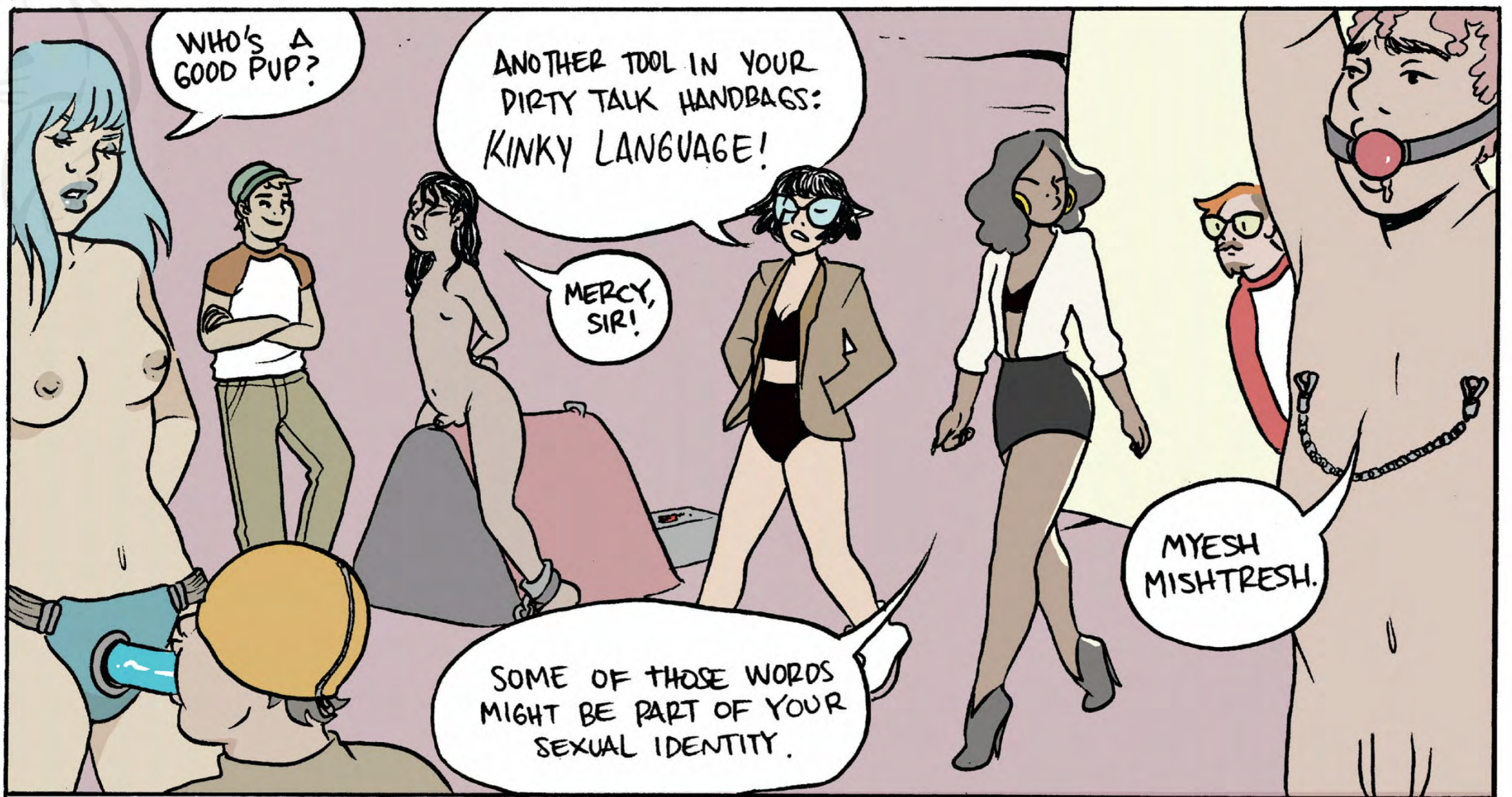
OR AS EXPRESSIONS
OF DESIRE, LIKE "I CAN'T
WAIT TO FLIP YOU OVER
AND EAT YOUR ASS TILL
YOU GUSH ALL OVER
THE PLACE."

I
WANT YOU
TO COME OVER
AND SIT YOUR
WET, HOT,
DRIPPING PUSSY
ON MY FACE!

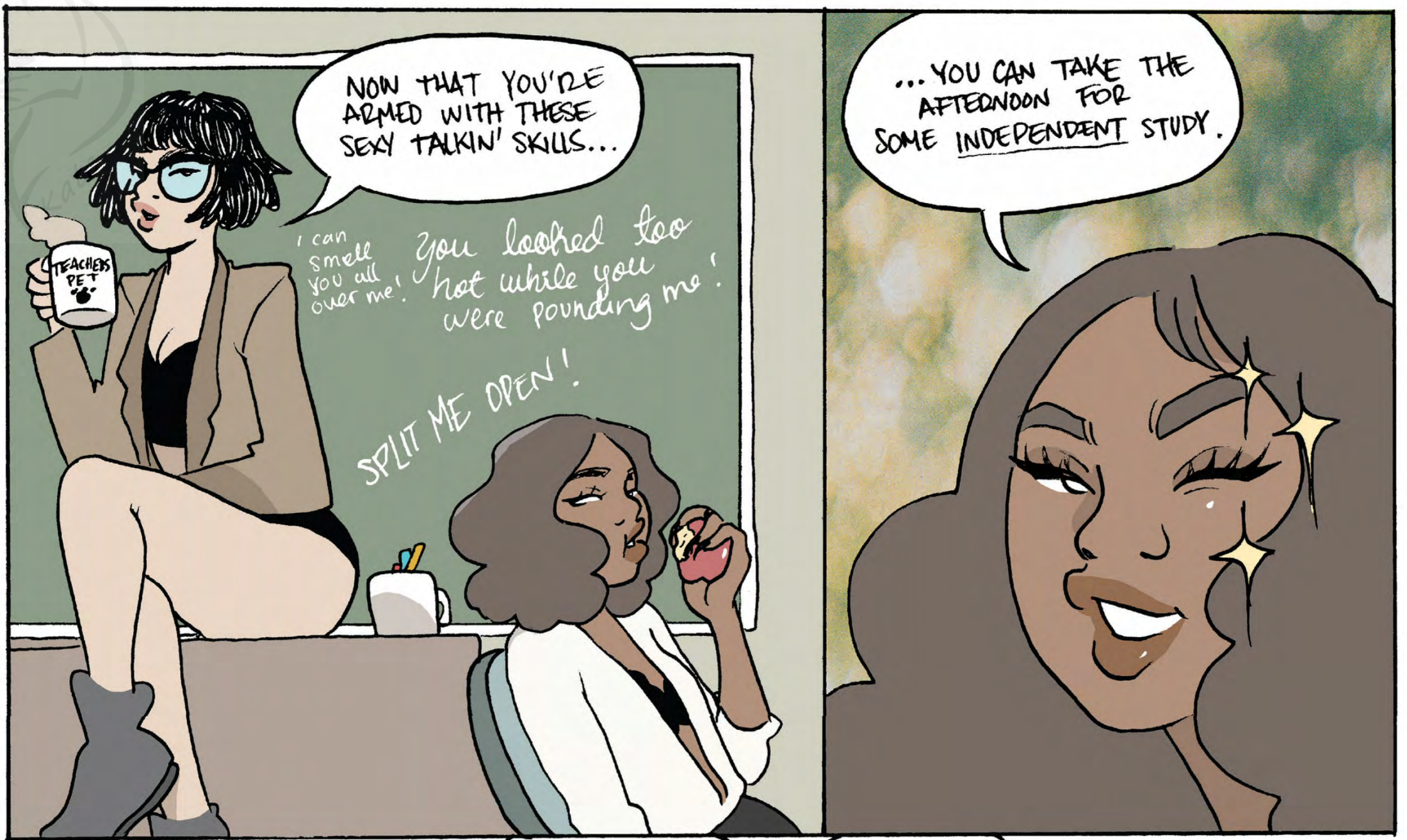
OR AS
INSTRUCTIONS --
"I WANT YOU
TO PUSH ALL
OF THAT
SPUNK OUT
OF YOUR CUNT
INTO MY
MOUTH."













a drink *with*
daveed diggs

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT SPANIER



The *Hamilton* breakout and *Snowpiercer* star peers into the future—of manhood, humanity and much in between

BY IRA MADISON III

Daveed Diggs is drinking bourbon on the rocks—Woodford Reserve, to be exact—as we sit in a 1970s-chic booth at the popular East Los Angeles bar Blind Barber. The drink is one you might associate with a laid-back man’s man at ease and in the moment. And though the signifiers from a bygone era are fitting, they hardly sum up the person in front of me.

Diggs appears to be at home here but not because he subscribes to some rakish Rat Pack ideal. The 38-year-old Oakland native was raised to embrace a more complex sense of identity. That much is apparent when you meet him, with his omnipresent grin and abundant Afro of curls.

The performer, who came up in theater and landed Grammy and Tony awards for his work in the Broadway megahit *Hamilton*, is uniquely qualified to usher in a new future for depictions of masculinity. This May he’ll star in TNT’s *Snowpiercer*—a television adaptation of the 2013 sci-fi film from director

Bong Joon Ho (whose latest movie, *Parasite*, made him the only person of color nominated for a 2020 best-director Oscar). Diggs co-wrote and starred in his own film—2018’s *Blindspotting*, earning him an Independent Spirit Award nomination for acting—but with the new gig he’s finally getting the opportunity to show his version of a mainstream leading man. For Diggs, this evolution comes with the responsibility to make good use of his growing platform.

“The value of black life has been displayed for us so much in the past few years, and it’s been pretty disheartening,” he says. “All the ways we thought we might have been valued turn out to be not true. And then we have people in power who are not disheartened by

that and, in fact, are playing right into it. If you have an election coming up, it’s fucking stressful.”

His sense of innate human value likely came from his father, whom Diggs describes as having “never withheld a demonstration of love to anybody,” particularly not to him and his brother. Diggs told *Esquire* in 2016 that his dad “doesn’t necessarily identify as gay, but I’ve known my father’s boyfriends [throughout] my life.” As Diggs tells PLAYBOY, “We lived in dangerous places, but I never felt unsafe with my father around. Strength and emotion were not opposites. They were all in one man for me, and in one man without a heteronormative identity.”

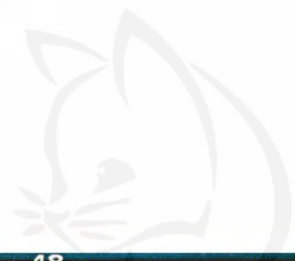
Stemming from this, he’s adamant about remembering where he came from. “It’s an interesting thing to make art for a place that doesn’t exist,” Diggs says, speaking of an Oakland that’s nearly unrecognizable from the place where he grew up. “Oakland is changing so fast, and most of the people I grew up with live elsewhere. Even if they’re still in the Bay and still claim it, they live on the outskirts and come into Oakland to hang out sometimes.”

Set in his hometown, *Blindspotting* tackles themes of memory and loss—the latter due in this case to gentrification and displacement of natives. Although it’s set far, far away from Oakland, *Snowpiercer* grapples with similar themes: A failed global-warming experiment kills much of the planet, plunging it into ice and carving ever-deepening divisions between the haves and the have-nots.

The idea of using science fiction to confront real-world concerns has always interested Diggs, a self-proclaimed *Star Trek* fan. “Fucking climate change scares the shit out of me right now,” he says. “*Snowpiercer* barely seems like sci-fi at this point.”

If there’s another thread running through Diggs’s projects—which will soon include the Showtime limited series *The Good Lord Bird*, in which he plays Frederick Douglass—it’s that he wants to choose characters who continue to push our cultural conversation forward. (He’ll also put his spin on a beloved crustacean when he voices Sebastian in Disney’s remake of *The Little Mermaid*.) “I don’t like to play in worlds where stupidity is excused or justified or is part of the world,” Diggs says, emphasizing his preference for complex studies of human desires and conflicts.

That’s true even when they’re controversial. Take his recent turn in the off-Broadway play *White Noise*: In last year’s buzzy production from Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, his character has an encounter with the police and then asks his white friend to be his owner in order to feel safer in the world. It is dangerous territory for a play to explore, but Diggs loves working with black artists who have something to say about race and politics in America. Among those who earn his praise: *Moonlight* co-writer Tarell Alvin McCraney, poet Chinaka Hodge (“my favorite writer of words”), 2019 Pulitzer-winning playwright Jackie Sibblies Drury and *Slave Play* playwright (and Fall 2019 *Playboy Interview* subject) Jeremy O. Harris.



Diggs has learned a lot shooting *Snowpiercer* scenes alongside his Oscar-winning co-star Jennifer Connelly—lessons that will come in handy as he seeks to increase his impact outside of the New York theater scene that incubated his career.

“Music these days has become accessible to everybody, and that’s good, so I always want to keep making music,” he says. (In addition to his many acting projects, Diggs fronts the hip-hop group Clipping.) “That’s another reason it’s important to work in TV and film: Those are actually more accessible than theater in a lot of ways. Even if I’m sort of uncomfortable with them, I want to figure out ways to tell the important stories by those means.”

Talk of the future raises another question: Has his father’s evolved masculinity inspired Diggs to raise a family of his own? The artist says he “desperately” wants to have kids and explains how his creative choices will factor into the herculean task of fatherhood.

“Raising black kids in the world, I want them to be less afraid than I was,” he says. “I wonder, What the hell kind of place am I bringing a kid into, and is that okay? That’s stressful, and it also makes me want to keep making art that’s important and speaks to those things.”

He concludes the thought on a note that would surely make his father proud. “I want the world to be better for my children, whenever they get here.”

“

TV and film are more accessible than theater. Even if I’m sort of **uncomfortable** with them, I want to figure out ways to tell the **important stories** by those means.”



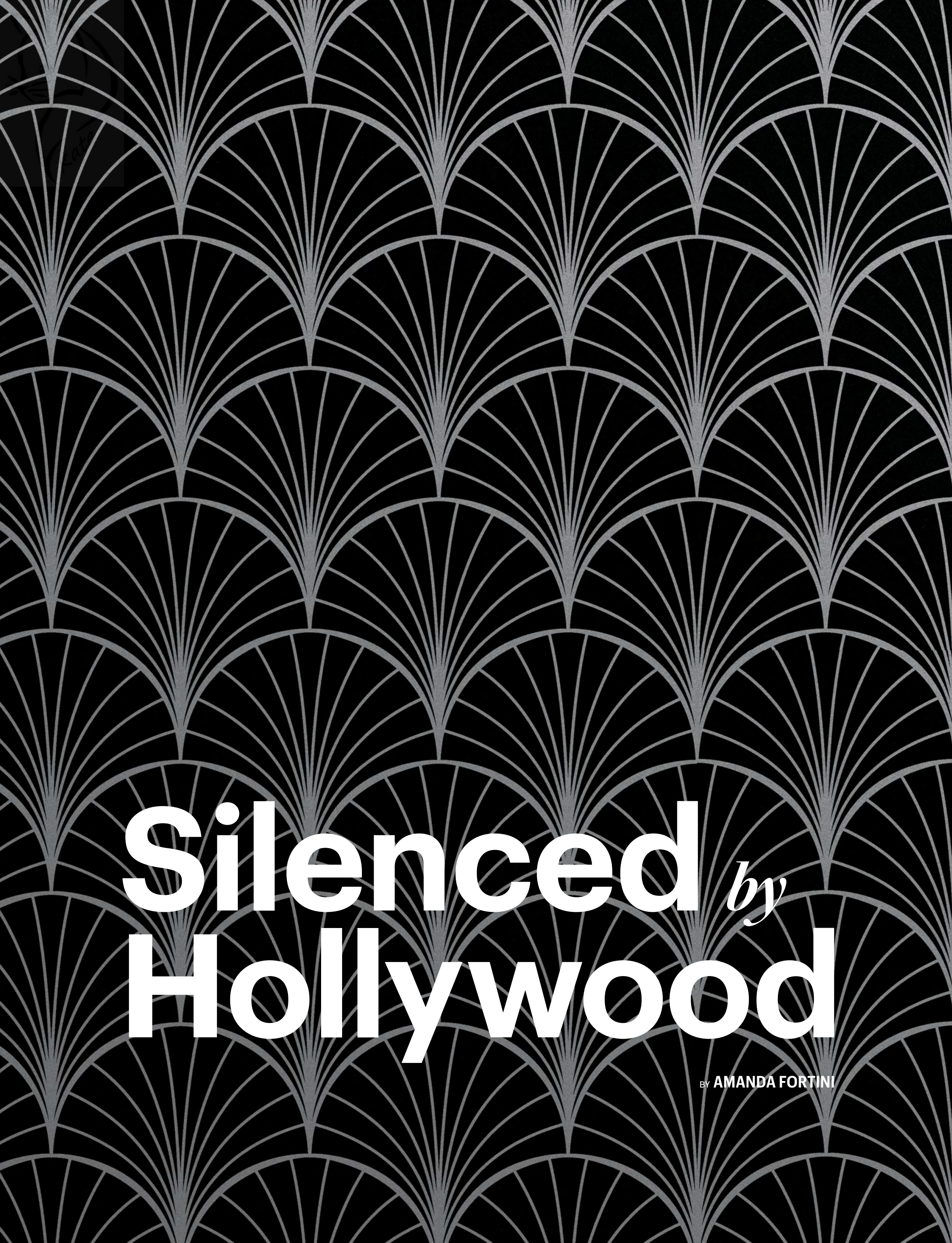












Silenced *by* Hollywood

BY AMANDA FORTINI





Despite public perception that women's voices are now being heard in the film and TV industries, the price of speaking out can still be steep

In 2012, actor, writer and producer Naomi McDougall Jones set out to make her first feature film, *Imagine I'm Beautiful*, a psychological drama about the friendship between “two interesting, complex female characters,” in her words. She and her female co-producer began having conversations with investors and producers—primarily though not entirely male—who would often make comments like “Well, girls, you know you’re going to have to get a male producer onboard at some point just so people will trust you with their money.”

“Literally, it was this never-ending refrain of ‘Yeah, but nobody wants to see movies about women,’” recalls McDougall Jones, whose book, *The Wrong Kind of Women: Inside Our Revolution to Dismantle the Gods of Hollywood*, was published in February. “‘You really have to think about making something else.’ Or ‘Is there a lesbian angle you could explore?’ or ‘Could you have more blood?’ I was like, Oh, my God, what the fuck is happening?”

Around that time, Stacy Smith, a professor and researcher at the University of Southern California who had been tracking gender and diversity in top-grossing films since 2007, noted in a *Hollywood Reporter* article that of the top 100 films of 2013, two of them—two!—were directed by women and that women claimed less than a third of all speaking parts.

The numbers were shocking, but they didn’t surprise me. Living in an overwhelmingly male neighborhood in Malibu (one populated by single men, divorced men, consummate bachelors and retirees—many of them Hollywood veterans), I regularly heard men talk in ways I hadn’t anywhere else: about “chicks” they’d fucked, about “unfortunate” episodes with strippers, about preferences for disturbingly young women.

I’d begun to form a picture of Hollywood as one of the most retrograde places on earth—“the last extant stable society,” as

Joan Didion wrote, referring to its status-quo conservatism—one where women are treated as fungible, dispensable beauties, where female directors aren’t given work and actresses are rarely given lines. I often wondered what equality might look like. As I set out to write this article, five and a half years after my time in Malibu and more than two after the second coming of MeToo, I still didn’t have an answer.

...

In October 2017, three months after Smith released her 2016 findings—“The needle is not moving onscreen for females in film,” she wrote—*The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* both published articles in which numerous women recounted being harassed, abused and assaulted by Harvey Weinstein, the godfather of contemporary independent film. Among the first women to speak out were four well-known actresses—Rosanna Arquette, Ashley Judd, Asia Argento and Mira Sorvino—in addition to many lesser-known others. (Models and assistants also made statements.) Their stories were remarkably similar in their horrifying contours: tales of being summoned to hotel rooms for meetings where Weinstein would undress, don a bathrobe, demand massages, take showers in front of the women, touch them inappropriately, offer work for sex, assault and sometimes rape them.

“I’ve always been an outspoken woman. The MeToo stuff isn’t new for me,” says Arquette, referring to the movement started by Tarana Burke in 2006 and reignited by Alyssa Milano on Twitter, when we speak on the phone one afternoon. “But to come out and tell the truth, about a man who sexually assaulted and abused and threatened and bullied many, many women—probably the most powerful man in Hollywood, as we’re seeing from the lengths he went to disrupt, destroy and discredit everyone—has been a lot.”



Why hadn't these women spoken out earlier? In the *New York Times* article, reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey wrote about the "code of silence" enforced by Weinstein at his company. At least eight women had received settlements, and most who accepted payment signed nondisclosure agreements that muzzled them; some had finally decided to break those provisos. Others were afraid of all the usual things women fear: retribution and ruined careers, reputations and lives. But by late in the second decade of the 21st century Bill Cosby and Roger Ailes had fallen, and the world was beginning to change. "Women have been talking about Harvey amongst ourselves for a long time," Ashley Judd told the *Times*, "and it's simply beyond time to have the conversation publicly."

The Weinstein stories poured forth. Gwyneth Paltrow and Angelina Jolie reported their own run-ins with him, their fame acting as a kind of ballast for the other accounts—more than 100 to date. Actress Annabella Sciorra excavated a cache of frightening memories, including being raped by Weinstein in her own apartment. As I write this, she's testifying against him at his criminal trial in Manhattan.

Women in entertainment began to open up not only about sexual misconduct—there were so many galling stories, from Les Moonves's intimidation tactics to Matt Lauer's creepy desk button to R. Kelly's reported abuse of underage girls, that it was difficult to keep track—but also about formerly taboo subjects such as pay equity, lack of representation and feeling unsafe on set.

"Historically, if you won an acting award, you were allowed to get up and make your speech for whatever your cause was, and hopefully it was something taking place many thousands of miles away from Hollywood," Richard Rushfield, who writes the industry newsletter *The Ankler*, tells me. "But as an actor you're not allowed to complain about the movie business and how it's done."

Yet actors were talking. The *Grey's Anatomy* star Ellen Pompeo spoke about that traditionally forbidden subject, her paycheck—she was astonishingly transparent about the negotiations that led to her \$20 million annual salary—and expressed her frustration with ABC for refusing to pay her more than Patrick Dempsey, her former co-star. Olivia Munn successfully lobbied for the deletion of a scene from the film *The Predator* in which she appeared alongside convicted sex offender Steven Wilder Striegel.

But Munn's story exemplifies the blow-back a woman in Hollywood experiences if she's too candid or too vocal. The actress told *Van-ity Fair* that her male co-stars brushed her off

and canceled interviews with her; they also gave the film's director, Shane Black, a tone-deaf standing ovation at the film's premiere. "I kind of feel like I'm the one going to jail," Munn said.

I thought of this when I read that Gabrielle Union's *America's Got Talent* contract wasn't renewed late last year after she'd reported a toxic and racially insensitive work environment at NBCUniversal. (According to one report, she was repeatedly told her hair was "too black.") "Are you going to assimilate and allow all of this to go on? Or are you going to say something and immediately be othered?" Union said on an empowerment-and-diversity panel shortly after she was fired.

Seeing this, I began to ask: Was Hollywood really changing? If so, for whom? Women might be speaking up more, about injustices personal and professional, but at what cost? Had we witnessed a seismic, lasting shift or a fissure that was already sealing itself up?

"I think it depends on who you are in Hollywood, in terms of your ability to speak out," Melissa Silverstein, founder and publisher of the site Women and Hollywood, tells me. "Yes, for some people it has changed, but I still think there's a price you pay when you speak out and you're a woman, and particularly when you're a woman of color."

• • •

In October 2015, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission began an investigation into Hollywood's discriminatory hiring practices—a secret as open in the industry as Weinstein's predatory behavior—after the ACLU notified the agency of ongoing discrimination against female directors. (Less than two years later, the EEOC entered into settlement talks with the major studios; if charges can't be resolved, a lawsuit will likely be filed.)

The following month, *The New York Times Magazine* published Maureen Dowd's landmark article "The Women of Hollywood Speak Out," for which the writer interviewed more than 100 women and men in film. Citing Smith's research, she noted the disproportionately small number of women who had directed the top-grossing films of the previous two years—only 1.9 percent of the total. "It's kind of like the Church," said Anjelica Huston in the piece. "They don't want us to be priests. They want us to be obedient nuns."

Ellen Barkin, whose credits range from *Sea of Love* to *Ocean's Thirteen*, calls herself an "opinionated shit-stirrer." "Women pay dearly" for speaking out, she tells me. "Men don't experience any of this."

Historically, of course, outspoken women in entertainment have been censored, silenced and maligned. In the early 20th century, Mae West, whose racy performances consistently pushed boundaries, was banned from radio, saw her shows shut down and once spent 10 days in jail on obscenity charges. Jane Fonda was branded the treacherous "Hanoi Jane" for her anti-war activism (and for the ill-considered photo she posed for on a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun while on a 1972 trip to Hanoi), even though by that time much of America was against the Vietnam war. To be sure, women are labeled difficult or crazy for much less: being too abrasive, too louche, even too old. As Tina Fey once wrote, "The definition of 'crazy' in show business is a woman who keeps talking even after no one wants to fuck her anymore."

Jena Friedman, comedian and former writer for *The Late Show With David Letterman*, tells me, "Any woman getting on stage, you're inherently political because you're occupying a space that you historically haven't been able to or been encouraged to occupy."

Many never made it that far. "The history of film is littered with the careers of women who have spoken out," says McDougall Jones. "The fact is, we don't know who they all are because they were

This isn't a takedown of men. It's about holding bad people accountable."

squashed." She tells me that when she began talking about the difficulties she had getting her two feature films made, she was "informed, in no uncertain terms, that if I did not shut up, I would destroy my career."

Arquette knows this all too well: "I was told by close girlfriends of mine, 'You should be quiet.'" She tells me she has been given the cold shoulder by certain figures in the industry, and she recalls the silence of friends in the days before the Weinstein trial. "I didn't hear from anyone; I still haven't. I do have the sisters, the sister-survivors—the other women. But I've never felt so alone in my life."

If you watched the Golden Globes, held the night before Weinstein's trial began in early January, you likely noticed that no one mentioned the famous predator or his trial—other than the much-maligned Ricky Gervais. ("Our next presenter starred in Netflix's *Bird Box*," he said of Sandra Bullock, "a movie where people survive by acting like they don't see a thing—sort of like working for Harvey Weinstein.") Similarly, at the 2018 Golden Globes, which were held a mere three months after the allegations broke, actresses wore all black on the red carpet in a rather tepid act of protest. None of the silence-breakers were present, with the exception of Ashley Judd.

Nearly everyone I interviewed mentioned the initially anemic response of the Hollywood establishment, particularly that of Time's Up, the anti-harassment initiative that boasts many high-profile founders (among them Reese Witherspoon, Eva Longoria and Natalie Portman) and a great deal of money (\$24 million) but few concrete achievements anyone could point to.

"In Hollywood, everyone wants to wear the pins and walk down the red carpet and say how concerned they are," says Rushfield, referring to the Time's Up lapel pins attendees wore to the 2018 Golden Globes. "But getting into details is not what actors do." Arquette, however, emphasizes that the group has been more vocal in support of survivors since lawyer and former Michelle Obama aide Tina Tchen took the helm in November. Recently the organization issued a statement critical of NBCUniversal for dismissing Union and "protecting the careers of powerful men at the expense of women who speak out." Tchen also told me they have funded PR and legal support for more than 200 harassment and discrimination cases.

Still, Rushfield suggests that the movement is backsliding:

"MeToo sort of became a net. It's like the narrative became, 'Well, that solves that. That's dealt with now.' So people who have continued are raining on the parade. It's like, 'Hey, remember when we solved sexual harassment?'"

"A lot of men are waiting for this 'episode' to go away," Arquette says. "They're doing everything they can to shut it down and shut it up, and there are many predators still in power in Hollywood."

She goes momentarily quiet. I can hear traffic noises in the distance. "There are so many good men, and we want them to be our allies," she continues. "This isn't a takedown of men. It's about holding bad people accountable."

Everyone I spoke with also emphasized that what keeps women—and trans and nonbinary people—silent isn't only men but a deeply entrenched system. Women also enforce the patriarchy, as anyone who has read bell hooks knows.

"We're working in a system set up by a bunch of white guys, 55 and over, who have put in place a few white women, 55 and over," says Barkin. "I believe that if you're an outspoken woman in Hollywood, if you're a woman who overtly protects herself in Hollywood, and if you're lucky enough to work as an artist, the price you will pay"—she raises her famously gravelly voice—"will be your art. Your very reason for being is the price you will pay, one way or another. They don't have to not employ you—they can employ you forever—but you won't get the opportunities to be who you are, to fill up your own well. And opportunity is everything."

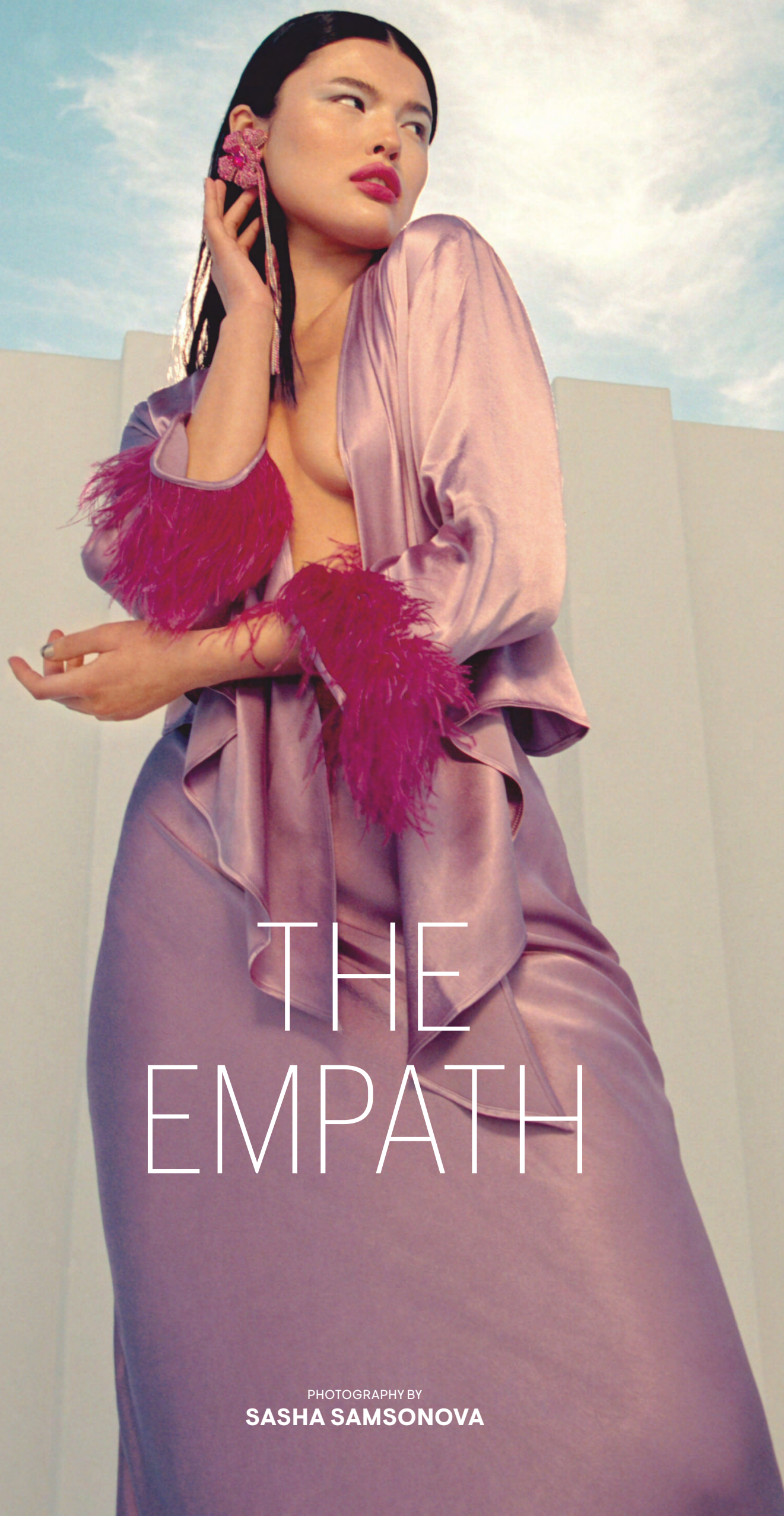
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In 2020 opportunity is everything, because the scarcity of jobs makes people reluctant to speak out for fear they won't work. In 2018 only five of the 112 directors who worked on the 100 top-grossing films were women, and female actors still played only 33.1 percent of characters with lines. Opportunity is everything, because the people who tell our stories, and the actors who embody them, shape our culture, our reality. If all the storytellers are men, society will continue to believe that only men are entitled to speak; we'll continue to live in a world that believes only men's subjectivity matters. The lack of jobs and the collective consciousness are not unconnected.

"Something like 95 percent of all the images you've ever seen in films were directed by men, and overwhelmingly white, straight, cis men," says McDougall Jones. "Eighty to 90 percent of all the leading characters you've ever seen in movies were white men, and 55 percent of the time you've seen a woman character on screen in a film, she was naked or scantily clad. Draw a line between that and the studies showing that the films and media content we watch generally affect everything from our career choices to our hobbies to our relationships to our sense of identity to literally our brain chemistry. If you hold those two facts beside each other, you have to think about the enormity of what that has done to us."

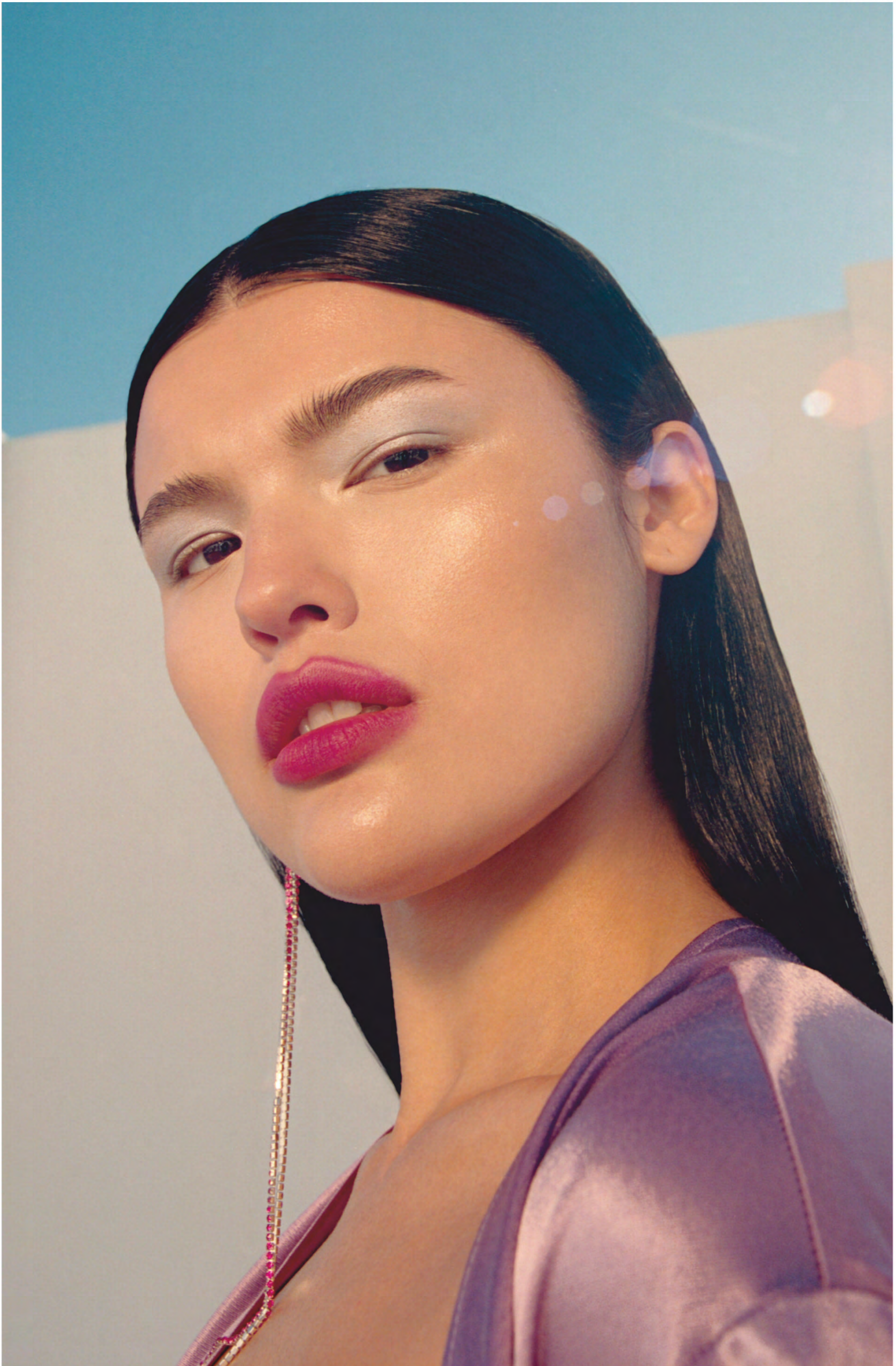
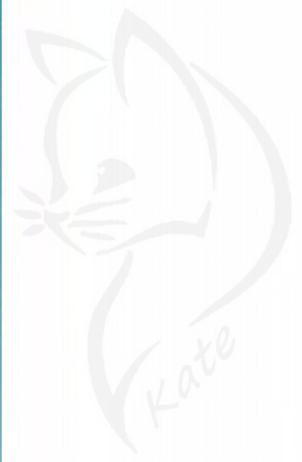
What's frustrating is that the solution remains remarkably straightforward, attainable even. "The problem in Hollywood is that you actually have to give people jobs for it to change," says Silverstein. "The people in power actually have to hire women. And that's really simple: Just hire them!"

As the old guard dies out, Barkin is hopeful. "The change is coming," she says. "It's just a waiting game now." 



THE EMPATH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
SASHA SAMSONOVA



JUNE PLAYMATE



There are billions of people on this Earth but only one **Alicia Loraina Olivas**—and our June Playmate is on a mission to celebrate the unique beauty of every last one of us

“Alicia, you’re amazing.”

I was at a shoot the other day and had to stop, look in the mirror and remind myself of this fact. For most of my life I’ve been on a journey to find peace with who I am. I’m in an amazing place now, but it hasn’t been easy.

Growing up, I got picked on a lot for being overweight. I would come home from school and cry because I wanted to be skinny so I could fit in with everyone else. In middle school I swung between wearing shirt girdles and eating my younger sister’s birthday cake out of the trash. Eventually I thought, *Okay, girlfriend, something’s got to change; you can’t keep living your life like this*. The pressure of wanting to fit in, to be liked and wanted, was just too much.

When I changed schools halfway through middle school, I began to let my personality shine through. I made some friends and gradually realized my weight didn’t matter to anyone. When I turned 16 I started making healthier lifestyle decisions—but not because I wanted to fit in or lose weight. Being unhealthy made me depressed, and changing my lifestyle helped me find confidence and happiness. It finally clicked: It was never about getting other people to like me; it was always about me loving myself.

I now believe I was meant to go through those struggles so I could share my story and help others. I have a deep sense of empathy ingrained in me. I feel like a sponge a lot of the time: always picking up on people’s energy and learning from them.

That’s part of what drew me to pursue a degree in social

anthropology (which, simply put, is the study of human societies and their development over time). People have always intrigued me—the way they feel, think, react to one another. The estimated world population is about 7.7 billion people, and not one single individual is the same as another. Each of our voices is important. We should spend more time listening and less time judging each other based on our exteriors.

Of course I’m very passionate about modeling. I’ve had a lot of exciting opportunities over the past few years, but being a Playmate is by far the highlight of my career thus far. I’m the only person in the world who gets the honor of being the June 2020 Playmate, and that’s special. This is the first time I’ve ever posed nude, but I find that doing anything for the first time is exciting, and I like to live life with no regrets!

Going into the shoot I felt some natural insecurities creep in, and I couldn’t help wondering how my body would be perceived by the world. I had to look in the mirror and remind myself how beautiful I am just the way I am—model, student and activist; a woman of Mexican, Spanish, Irish, French and Native American descent; a force to be reckoned with. During the shoot all the love I’ve kindled within myself came shining through.

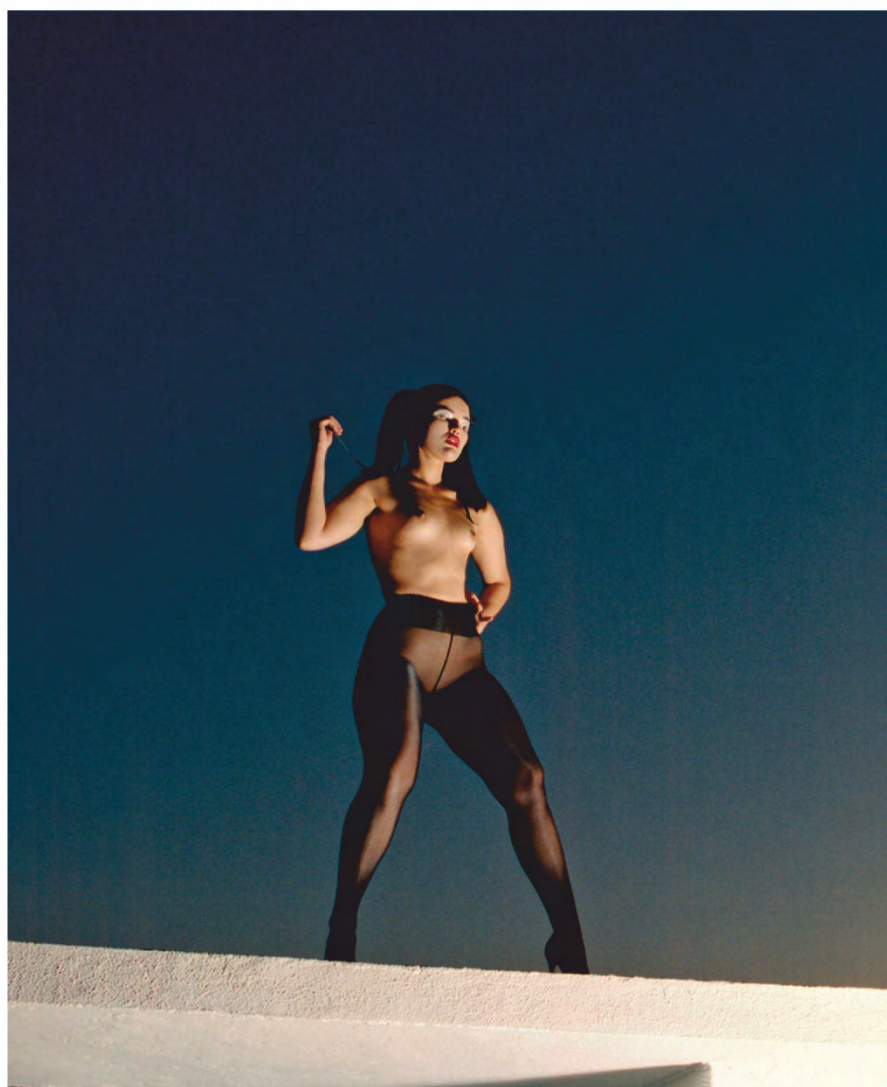
I wouldn’t be where I am today, standing proud as the June 2020 Playmate, if I hadn’t learned the power of self-love. You can’t love other people and put love back into the world until you love yourself.

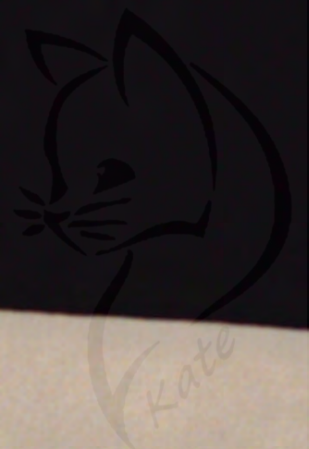












DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE AND CURRENT CITY: Las Vegas, Nevada

ON GRATITUDE

I was brought up by a single mom tasked with raising three girls. We didn't have everything, but we were grateful for what we did have. As an adult, I see the potential in all things. You just have to find it and work with what you've got.

ON SIGNS

I'm a water sign (Cancer, to be specific), so water has always been symbolic for me. When I was younger my grandma taught me to meditate; she would put on water sounds and encourage me to visualize the water flushing out all the negativity inside me. It's a powerful force.

ON ROLE MODELS

Audrey Hepburn inspired a lot of the creative looks for my photo shoot. She was so talented and famous but also so humble, and she used her position to help less fortunate people. I hope to do that too one day.

ON FRUGALITY

If I'm at someone's house and there's maybe five or six ingredients lying around, I can make a three-course meal out of it. I also love thrift shopping and digging through everything to find the hidden gems. It's like a treasure hunt!

ON AFFIRMATIONS

If you say or think one negative thing about yourself, you have to come back with seven positive things. You just have to get out there and believe in yourself, and things will naturally come to you. I believe that 100 percent.

ON JET-SETTING

I went on my first plane ride about a month ago. I'm ready to see the world!

ON PHOBIAS

I love doing anything outside; the only problem is I hate insects. I have a terrible

fear of tiny dots, so insects—especially ants—really freak me out. I get goose bumps just thinking about it.

ON ROAD GOALS

I just got my driver's license—at the age of 21. You should have seen my Uber bills!

ON DEMOCRACY

Voting is not taken as seriously as it once was. It's vital that people's voices are heard loud and clear. The world can't change without the help of all of us. That's why we must demand to live in a world with justice, peace and unity.

ON FAITH

I love learning about different religions. Growing up I wanted to go to the Appalachian Mountains and be a monk. But then I realized I'd have to be a nun. Maybe one day I'll be the first female monk!

Alicia Oinas





JUNE 2020 PLAYMATE





Mindy Soria

JUNE 2020 PLAYMATE

Your First Pet and the Street You Grew Up On

She's not quite
woman's best
friend

FICTION BY
KILEY REID





ILLUSTRATION BY
CASEY WELDON

When I came back to Tucson for Christmas break, my mom was like, “You need to clean out your closet or you’re not going anywhere.” This was her way of being dumb about the fact that I’d gained a few pounds since I’d started college, but I was like *fine* ’cause it was whatever. I was going to buy new shit anyway. My high school friends were having a reunion, Aaron Trujillo was going to be there, and I was obviously going too. So I took a huge trash bag into my closet and started filling it up with stuff I hadn’t worn or touched in years. But when I pulled out a very old Halloween costume from when my high school friends and I were Bath & Body Works flavors, underneath it, there was Magenta.

“Oh my God.”

“Oh Jesus.” She put her little claw in front of her face. “Shit. That’s—that’s a lot of light....”

“Magenta?”

The plastic cage sat on a shelf next to my old yearbooks and duffel bags. It looked exactly the same. Neon pipes, pink hamster wheel, some toilet paper tubes and a shit ton of mulch. But Magenta was different. She looked a few years older than me, or maybe just more mature. There was new white fur underneath her eyes.

When I was little she walked quietly on all fours, but now she stood up like she had somewhere to be. On top of her gray fur Magenta wore a silky floral robe that she kept fixing and a teeny pair of Uggs that looked like they’d been in the rain. She held her robe closed, and then she waved.

“What are you...how are you still here?”

“Hey, Natalie.” Magenta half laughed. “Hey—listen, this doesn’t have to be weird. You grew up, you know? You had other things to do. And honestly, I totally understand.” She pushed a tuft of fur behind her left ear.

I sat down on my bed. It was weird being back in my room with all of the Got Milk? ads and *Moulin Rouge!* posters taped on the wall above my twin bed. I couldn’t remember the last time I saw Magenta, but it must have been when I still had braces and before my hair was red, which seemed like forever ago. I knew I was bad at remembering things (what time my classes were, if I took my birth control, quesadillas in the microwave), but I didn’t think I was this bad. “Why do I remember you dying?”

“Ummm....” Magenta winced and I saw all four of her teeth. “Maybe because a lot of your friends’ pets died?”

“How would you even know that?”

“You’re really loud on the phone.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“Ohmygosh, don’t be. It used to give, like, a rhythm to my day. Back when you still lived here.”

Magenta peeked in her pocket and I saw the glow of a tiny cell-phone light up inside. She looked back up at me and smiled.

“Well,” I said. “Should I feed you or something? Do you need new water?”

“I mean....” Magenta laughed again. “If you want...?”

I stared at my hands on my lap.

“Well, I don’t eat stimulants anymore, and I try to stay away

from dairy,” she said. “So actually, as far as food’s concerned, I’m honestly all set.”

I had five more days until I went back to school. I kept my closet door open because it felt awful to think of closing it. Magenta made a really big deal of putting her headphones on when I talked on the phone. When I changed my clothes she’d bury herself under a bunch of mulch or pick up a tiny fashion magazine. I knew she was trying to make me comfortable, but it just made me feel worse.

I asked my mom how long she’d been feeding Magenta.

“Well, honey, I don’t *feed* Magenta.” She laughed like this was a psycho thing to do. “It’s not like she’s a child. She just makes her grocery list and I pick up a few things.”

But it wasn’t just a few things. My mom wrapped a tiny iTunes gift card and put it underneath the tree. While we watched *The Devil Wears Prada* on DVD, she sat on the floor and made a mini version of those holiday buckets, the ones with three different kinds

of popcorn, and she barely laughed or quoted all the parts we used to love, like when Meryl Streep is all *Why is no one readyyyyy?* Or we’d be walking in the mall and she’d want to make “a really quick stop” at some weird, expensive doll store. She’d take forever, and I’d be like, “Mom.” She’d be like, “Well, honey, Magenta can get *cold*.”

I couldn’t wait to go back to Phoenix.

At my dorm I was fucking hilarious. I didn’t have class on Fridays. My roommates and I got blackout on the reg. And I did this super funny impression of our dorm’s security guard as if he’d just won a million dollars. Or it’s more like if

he *accidentally* won a million dollars and he was just finding out. It sounds weird when I say it now, but I swear everyone dies for it. In Tucson I had nothing to say.

Every time I tried to tell my mom about the cool shit I was doing back home in the dorms (growing basil out my window, getting a B in finance), she’d be like, “Well, *excuuuseee* me! I guess I was mistaken, because I thought *this* was your home.”

• • •

Lara Brumski was having the reunion at her parents’ house. I had to buy a size large, but whatever, I looked good. Still, every time I looked at Aaron Trujillo, he was looking down at his phone. I remembered how it felt when he said *Atta girl* to me at graduation, when I parallel parked Lara Brumski’s truck on the first try, and I just wished he would bring it up, or that someone would arrive and really need their truck parallel parked.

The only time he talked to me at the reunion was after I said I’d seen *The Blind Side* with my mom. “You actually saw that movie?”

He was sitting on the kitchen counter and both his shoes were untied, on purpose. I sucked my stomach in. “Yeah, it wasn’t that bad.”

“It *is* that bad,” he said. He scratched the side of his shaved head. “It’s another one of those movies where white people come in and save the day. And it’s like, ‘Oh hey, black people, you can be like us! Be like us and then we’ll like you!’ It’s bullshit.”

Lara Brumski grinned at me over her beer. “Didn’t you say you cried?”

“Umm, no,” I lied. “I said my *mom* cried.”

Later, in Lara Brumski’s backyard, I thought that maybe I

“HONEY, I
DON’T FEED
MAGENTA. IT’S
NOT LIKE SHE’S
A CHILD.”



could fix it by drinking more. But then, in the space between Aaron and me, his phone lit up. It said *Message from MAGENTA*. Next to the *M* was a pink heart emoji, and a little mouse face was next to the *A*. My chest suddenly felt like it wasn't even there.

I stood up. "Are you serious right now?"

Aaron said, "Natalie, chill." As I walked out of the backyard, I heard him go, "It's not like anything's happened," but it didn't really seem like he was saying this to me.

Lara Brumski was standing with beers in both her hands as I walked through the kitchen and took the keys from my purse. She looked past me to the sliding glass doors and mouthed to someone, "Oh shit, he told her?"

• • •

Magenta was in pajamas and eating popcorn when I came home. I closed my bedroom door, laid facedown on my bed and began to sob into my sheets.

Magenta said, "Oh God," and then, "Natalie, wait."

I heard her little nails tap at the side of the cage. The sound made my lungs all tight and scrunched up.

"Natalie, listen," she said. "Okay wait, I swear to God? Aaron is just a friend."

I sniffed and turned away from her.

"I'm serious," she said. "He's so random and completely not my type. But even if he was, I'd never do that to you."

I put my hands underneath my face.

"Natalie, don't cry." And then she kind of laughed. "You're gonna make *me* cry. Do you want to come feed me a little bit?"

I shook my head.

"Come on, like old times! Remember? Man, I'm *staarrvved*. What am I gonna do?" As she said this, she was sort of singing.

I sat up straight. If I was really so loud on the phone, then Magenta knew how I'd gone down on Aaron in his car in the rec center parking lot on the Fourth of July, how I begged him to at least think about visiting me at college and how it was only two hours away. "Okay," I said. I crossed my arms. "Okay, yeah. I'd like to feed you."

Magenta laughed and said, "Really?" It was clear she thought I was joking, but when I didn't wipe the snot away from my face—I let it drip down onto my skirt—Magenta closed her mouth and walked to her bowl.

I went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. I ripped off a stalk of some hard, green broccoli from the bottom drawer. My mom was watching *Law & Order: SVU* when I passed by the living room. When she saw the broccoli in my hand, she said, "Good for you, Nat!" Before I slammed my door I went, "Shut up, Mom!"

I threw the broccoli into Magenta's cage.

"Okay. Coooool." Magenta nodded slowly. She looked up at me and bit her bottom lip. "Can I be so annoying and ask for some olive oil?"

"No," I said. "I want you to eat it like old times."

Magenta blew through her lips. She walked to the broccoli, the bedding crunched beneath her, and she took a small floret in her hand.

"No," I said. "On all fours."

We stared at each other for what seemed like a long time. We did this until Magenta bent down and began to crawl around the broccoli. She looked as if she were in a game of charades or pretending to steal cookies from a jar that she was more than welcome to have in the first place. I felt like I was watching an adult do the hokey pokey with a child who wasn't theirs—putting their left arm in and their left arm out—at a birthday party they were obligated to attend.

Magenta took a bite. "Okay, *umm*, squeak squeak?" she said. "Thank you, Natalie. Yummers. Squeak squeak."

I sat down on the floor and hugged my legs.

How was I so fucking fat? Since when had my mom started doing arts and crafts? And did Aaron Trujillo really hate texting as much as he'd told me he did? Because it kind of seemed like he didn't.

Magenta came to the side of the cage and her face looked careful and sad. "Do you feel better?" she asked. "Or not so much."

I shook my head and said, "Not so much."

• • •

On my last night in Tucson, Lara Brumski texted me to say that she and Aaron made out and did some over-the-pants stuff in his parents' garage on Christmas Eve. As I packed my bags, Magenta asked me if I was okay, and we ended up talking for hours. I played my old CDs (Amy Grant, Jewel, Tori Amos, Toni Braxton), and she showed me how she charted what she ate (BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER and SNACKS). It wasn't as judgy as I'm making it sound. It was actually really nice.

Around midnight, I sat on my suitcase as Magenta organized her things. A little white bandanna was tied on her head, just above her ears. In a corner of her cage were three tiny boxes. One was labeled TOSS, one said KEEP, and the last one said DONATE.

"Hey, just to put it out there," I said, "You could drive back to Phoenix with me tomorrow. I have a closet in my dorm."

Magenta stood up and pushed her fur behind her ears. "Really?"

"It would be cool," I said. "You could even come to class if you wanted."

Obviously Magenta could be a little much, but we had history. Maybe she could help me get up in the morning since she was such an early riser. Maybe I could try some of her healthy eating habits. I felt like I could never forgive Aaron Trujillo and Lara Brumski, but I was the one who forgot Magenta was alive, and she seemed to have forgiven me. Most important, Magenta had always been mine to begin with.

"You know what?" she said. She partially closed one of her eyes. "I think that sounds really fun."

"Really?"

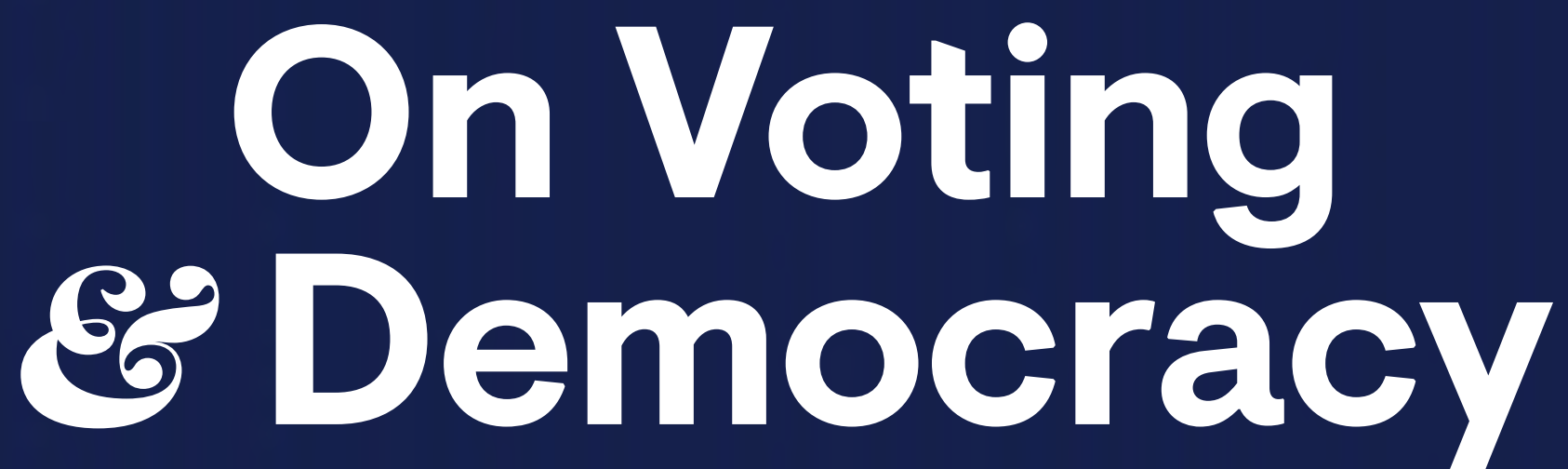
"Yeah," she said. "You know what, why not? I'm gonna pack my stuff and get my cage ready to go. A change of scenery would be really good for me right now."

But the next morning, Magenta was gone. Her cage was so empty that when I walked over to it, the wheel spun around once by itself. She'd left me a little note that I read using the magnifying glass my mom had on her key chain. Magenta had gotten an internship at a magazine I'd never heard of; she was hoping to be hired soon after, and she was moving in with friends. She hadn't had the heart to tell me, but she wanted to catch up with me soon, when everything cooled down and her schedule wasn't so all over the place. She wished me all the best.

There are times I see knitted boots or a colorful robe in a doll-store window that I think Magenta would like. Something she can wear around the house. I stop and I think about sending them to her, saying something quick and nice in a card that I'd attach, but then I remember that she didn't leave her address.

Writing down my meals actually works. I've lost four pounds, and now I'm kind of dying to see Magenta at brunch or at the places where the bartenders know my name, but I also know that these are places she'd probably never go. That Christmas, when I'd shown Magenta my impression of our dorm security guard winning a million dollars, she'd said, "Sorry...it kinda sounds like I'd have to be there."







Who Counts?

BY ALICIA GARZA

Our *Symposium* guest editor is a Black Lives Matter co-founder and voting-rights activist; her insights into the myth of American power could not be more urgent

The Constitution of the United States took a little more than 100 days to develop, yet it has taken 200 years and counting to fully realize. In it, the framework of this nation was established, and the process for building the nation was outlined with both painstaking detail and maddening vagueness.

The Constitution sought to establish a nation where freedom could take root—through the theft of sovereign land, the attempted genocide of the original stewards of that land and the enslavement of what would turn out to be millions of human beings. In an attempt to escape the tyranny of a corrupt monarchy, the so-called founding fathers mimicked much of what they left behind.

The project of building a new nation, while in some ways a departure from the most egregious offenses experienced under monarchical rule, was still predicated on the principles of power *over* rather than power *with*. The result was a new nation built on a system that had existed for hundreds of years: one person at the top, now with a series of checks and balances to ensure that no one person could abuse their power. In the end, more people got to be powerful, and rules were designed to make sure those powerful people kept their power.

Power, broadly defined, is the ability to make decisions over your own life and the lives of others. There are different forms of power, and political power—the ability to decide how decisions are made—is what the Constitution sought to establish. The Constitution did not seek to transform power itself, nor did it ever promise to. Instead, it ensured that more people had access to the ultimately corrupt forms of power that some had been denied.

The Constitution was an extraordinarily ambitious project but perhaps one that was doomed to fail from its inception.

I think about the Constitution often these days. I wonder how it came to be that a few dozen dudes with powdered wigs and slaves could come together for a few months and hammer out a whole series of systems that would not only have an undeniable impact on my life many generations later but would also set the terms for the fights of today. Did the dudes in wigs anticipate that 200-plus years later we would have someone leading the country with a wig of much lower caliber?

All insults aside, I've heard it said many times that the Constitution was designed for moments like this one, when

everything is at stake. I don't have any way of knowing what its authors' intentions were—given the fact that people like me were counted as only three fifths of a human being, primarily for the purpose of apportioning power and resources—but I can confidently say this: Who counts, who gets to decide and who shapes the rules that define what the decisions are in the first place—all of this matters. A lot.

Who counts is predicated, at least in the Constitution of this nation, on power—who gets it, who doesn't. That is why no woman was assured the right to vote until the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920—a century ago this year and 133 years after the Constitution was written. It is why a black person who was enslaved did not count as a whole person until 1868, three years after slavery was formally abolished and more than 80 years after the first draft of the Constitution was written.

Millions of people across the nation show up every four years to make their opinions known. Who makes the rules, and who shapes the terrain on which the rules are made, is arguably more important than our political parties and the ideologies that once defined them. Meanwhile, voter suppression, gerrymandering and redistricting loom over our polling places, along with a host of other pressing issues including climate disaster, police violence, equal pay and health care.

This year brings a new decade as well as what may be one of the most important elections of my lifetime. There is much more at stake than who becomes the commander in chief; this is a fight for who counts and who gets to shape the laws the rest of us are governed by. What happens in the 2020 election will have an undeniable impact on the structure and function of democracy itself.

Over the past decade we saw social movements emerge across the country, from Occupy Wall Street to Idle No More to Black Lives Matter to MeToo to the Women's March. These movements unearthed what had previously been below the surface: financial instability as a result of the rampant speculation and greed allowed by capitalism; climate devastation and its human impact; state-sanctioned violence and anti-black racism; racialized resentment and antagonism; sexual assault and violence at the hands of the powerful. What was once invisible erupted like geysers, and finally the whole world could witness, examine, contemplate and take a side.

The writers in this *Symposium* are some of the sharpest thinkers and doers in the country. They are the courageous ones who stand with those who have not had a seat at the table, those the table was deliberately designed not to accommodate. Here, we explore critical questions facing our country today: who matters, how change happens, who is being left behind and what we can do to transform the way power operates—once and for all.

Alicia Garza is co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement and founder of Black Futures Lab, which aims to empower black voters.



As Goes the South

BY LATOSHA BROWN

If you think the South is a bastion of retrograde conservatism, a co-founder of Black Voters Matter has news for you



In October 2018 I pulled up to a community center in Jefferson County, Georgia to meet with a group of senior citizens and talk about the importance of voting. Many of them had heard of the Black Voters Matter bus—what we call the “Blackest Bus in America”—and they wanted to go outside and see it. So we wrapped up the program, went out to the bus and had an impromptu pep rally, singing and dancing to the music of James Brown and Al Green.

My new friends asked if they could ride the bus down the block to vote early as a group. After folks had hopped on and just as we were pulling away, staffers from the center stopped us. Someone had seen the “black” bus and called a local official, who told the center to unload the seniors immediately.

These were fully competent adults who wanted to go vote. The official had no legal right to stop our trip. Sadly, this is only one of countless examples of politicians choking the black vote through apparent fear and intimidation.

When people hear stories about Jefferson County and other places in the South, they assume these are staunchly Republican states and always will be. The truth is the South is the fastest-growing region in the country and is becoming more racially and politically diverse. The South has 10 of the 15 most rapidly expanding cities in the nation. This growth is driven primarily by young people, LGBTQ people and people of color. In 2018 and 2016, millennials and other younger generations outvoted baby boomers and other older cohorts. These young voters tend to identify as independents, but they also tend to support progressive policies and candidates.

In 2019 Democrats won total control of Virginia’s government—both chambers of the legislature and the governorship—for the first time in more than two decades. Kentucky elected a Democratic governor over a Republican incumbent who had modeled himself after Trump. And a Democratic governor won a second term in Louisiana. The South, even the Deep South, is not as red as many people believe it to be.

In 2018 we witnessed an increase in Democratic turnout in the heart of the Confederacy, including Georgia, Alabama, Texas and Mississippi. Part of the surge was inspired by younger, more dynamic candidates such as Stacey Abrams, Andrew Gillum and Beto O’Rourke. There is tremendous growth potential for progressives to win in the South, especially for candidates willing to expand the electorate and bring in new voters.

Demographics are changing, but demographics are not destiny. The biggest threat to building power and expanding democracy in the South is voter suppression. It comes in many forms, including the fear and intimidation we saw in Jefferson County, structural and policy barriers to voting, and misinformation to confuse voters and drive down their interest in turning out. On Election Day in 2018, for example, law enforcement in Jackson, Mississippi set up roadblocks near a polling site. In Crisp County, Georgia seven law-enforcement vehicles arrived to issue a parking ticket to a black city commissioner who had offered rides to the polls all day in a borrowed limousine.

Since Republicans can’t win on their ideas, they’ve taken to cheating by way of purging voters from the rolls, passing restrictive voter-ID laws, gerrymandering, shutting down polling locations and more. In 2018 election officials in Randolph County, Georgia tried to close down seven of the nine polling places in the predominantly black community. The county abandoned the plan only after an overwhelming public outcry and national media attention.

Some 36 states have voter-ID laws that require people to possess specific forms of identification in order to vote. In Texas a gun license is an acceptable document, but a student ID is not. Voter-ID laws set up hurdles that hurt poor people, people of color, students and others who can’t afford the required documents or have other reasons for lacking identification. Nationwide, up to 25 percent of African American citizens of voting age don’t have government-issued photo IDs, compared with only eight percent of whites.

When all else fails, election officials simply kick voters off the rolls, erasing their right to vote as though they never existed. Nationwide, at least 17 million voters were purged from the rolls between 2016 and 2018, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law. Georgia alone just booted about 300,000 voters under a new state provision that encourages purges when voters are “inactive.”

As if this weren’t enough, disinformation campaigns specifically targeted black voters in 2016 and may do so again in 2020. The Russian Internet Research Agency used Facebook ads, memes and fake websites to discourage black people from voting. On social media platforms, a U.S. Senate committee found, “no single group of Americans was targeted...more than African Americans.” These efforts were shockingly successful: In 2016, for the first time in 20 years, black voter turnout for a presidential election declined.

So how do we shift the South? First, we disrupt the culture of fear by creating hope. We need to empower progressive candidates and campaigns that will build a coalition of diverse voters and challenge structural barriers to voting. We should not look at the South as a region that’s deeply conservative but a region that’s severely underfunded, its people’s power underutilized.

We can build a more just America, and the South is ground zero for this transformation. Once we shift the power dynamics rooted in fear and divisiveness in the South, we will shift this nation. We believe that our work in the South will make the difference.

We are doing the work. Ultimately we will win.

LaTosha Brown is co-founder of Black Voters Matter and the Southern Black Girls and Women’s Consortium.



Before the Ballot

BY RASHAD ROBINSON

The Color of Change president
explains how voters can tip the
scales toward real criminal justice

Not every vote has the same impact. I don't say that because some people's votes are disqualified for politically motivated reasons or because the electoral college renders some people's votes less potent than others'. All that is true. What I mean to say is that whether we get what we want from our votes has little to do with the election itself. Our votes lead to change only when a social movement backs them up.

This has certainly been the case with recent successes in criminal-justice reform. The 2020 candidates are talking about this issue today because we made reform feel possible and necessary in our communities and our culture first.

We currently lock up more people in jails, detention centers and prisons than any other country in the world: around 2.3 million, one in five of them for nonviolent drug offenses. We ensnare another nearly 4.5 million people in the probation and parole system, which often serves as just another way to exploit them financially before ultimately sending many of them back to jail or prison. On any given night American jails house 731,000 people, 76 percent of whom haven't been convicted of a crime. Most people get trapped in the system because they can't afford bail, which prosecutors and judges often set out of reach.

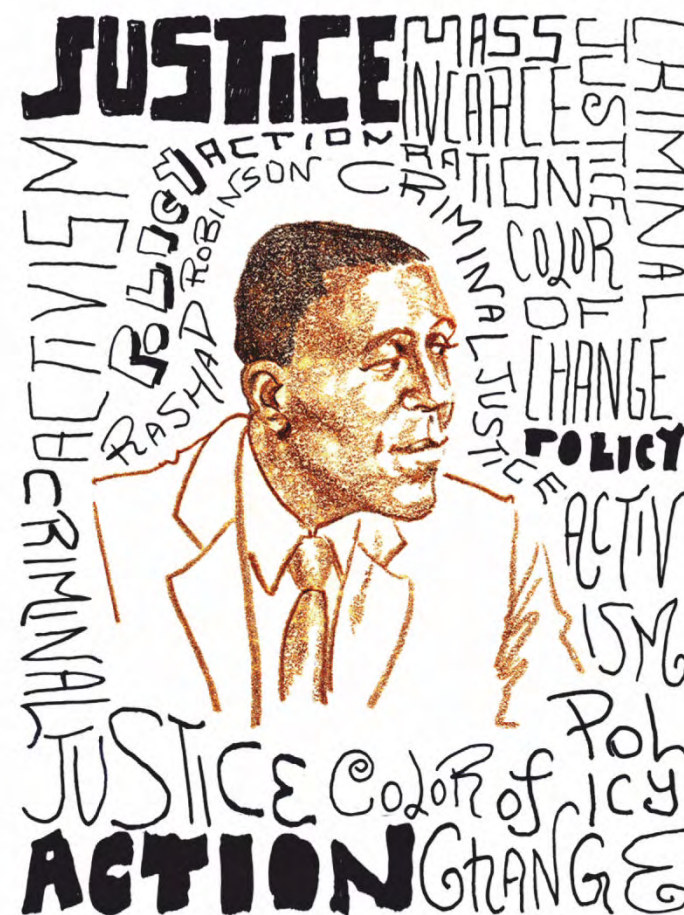
And that doesn't even include the policing side of criminal justice: the life-altering and community-destroying violations of our rights, the harassment and violence (including sexual violence) committed by law enforcement officers across the country every day, largely targeting communities of color. The entire system, in fact, is defined by racial bias and racial disparities—from prosecutors who pursue harsher sentences for black people than for white people for the same crime to an incarcerated population that is 40 percent black, even though black people represent only 13 percent of the U.S. population. "Reform" doesn't begin to capture what's needed, but it's the first step.

The movement pushing for reform in this space has risen over the past several years, amplified by social media and online organizing campaigns. It made politicians accountable long after the election was over and made them deliver on real policy change. But it didn't happen overnight.

On the first day of 2009, Oscar Grant was killed, and footage of his death subsequently went viral. Residents in Oakland, California took to the streets in protest. The recording of George Zimmerman's 911 call moments before he shot and killed Trayvon Martin in 2012 was shared on social media and moved Floridians into action, along with millions of their allies across the country. Then, in the summer of 2014, came the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri after the killing of Michael Brown. St. Louis-area activists not only demanded an end to police violence but also showed how money bail, excessive ticketing and other exploitative, racially driven practices had become so standard that city budgets were sustained on the backs of the black people they targeted. The 2015 death of Sandra Bland in Texas moved more people to raise their voices about abusive policing, pre-trial detention in jail and the refusal of local prosecutors to hold law enforcement accountable.

These moments and many others became highly visible symbols of the day-to-day injustice in our system and empowered a new wave of activism focused on racial justice. Everyday people were driven into the streets, into the media, into public service and into philanthropic endeavors.

And then into the polls. We used the vote to end the careers of politicians standing in the way of reform and to elevate those committed to it. New, black-led initiatives (like those of my own organization, Color of Change) sprouted across the country, aiming to channel the new wave of energy into the political process.



While the federal debate is important, more than 80 percent of America's prison population is incarcerated at the local and state levels. We put forward-thinking district attorneys, judges, sheriffs, governors and attorneys general on the ballot and made sure they got into office. Afterward, continued pressure made them deliver on their promises. This new political influence is a result of efforts by formerly incarcerated people and others from impacted communities—all essential leaders in campaigns targeting money-bail profiteers, changing what the public demands from prosecutors and so much more.

The power of culture also helped amplify the power of our movement and, ultimately, the power of our votes. Michelle Alexander's best-selling book *The New Jim Crow*, as well as Ava DuVernay's Emmy-winning documentary *13th* and recent Netflix series *When They See Us* are just a few examples of popular media that helped paint a clearer picture of a violently unjust criminal-justice system. Jay-Z, John Legend, Colin Kaepernick and many others, including those behind the scenes brave enough to move such projects forward, took on money bail, policing and other issues. They've all helped disrupt deeply held beliefs about crime and punishment that are rooted in racism and capitalism, and their efforts fuel the larger movement.

That momentum has forced politicians and decision makers to do things they didn't want to do, thought they couldn't do or thought they could get away with not doing. Candidates in 2020, from those running for prosecutor to those running for president, are all talking about criminal-justice reform. Former vice president Joe Biden, Senator Kamala Harris and others have been compelled to answer for their past criminal-justice policies. This line of questioning would have been unthinkable in the 2012 election. We've changed the standards for what it takes to win our votes.

Very little in politics just *happens*. Political discourse is guided by the public's demand for change. Criminal justice is now inextricably tied to the ballot because people forced the issue into public debate. But no matter what happens at the polls in November, our work isn't done. We have to ensure that once the election is over, campaign rhetoric translates into legal action. We have to continue to make our voices heard before our votes can drive change.

Rashad Robinson is president of Color of Change, a leading racial-justice organization with more than 1.5 million members.



Two Evils

BY ANGELA PEOPLES

When is “party solidarity” worse than voting your conscience—especially for marginalized Americans? A grassroots political strategist weighs in

PLAYBOY 199



Silencing the Status Quo

BY MARISA FRANCO

When American outsiders organize, their combined voices can change elections—and the co-founder of Mijente has proof



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Voting functions as a political oil change. In ideal circumstances it allows for an organized battle of ideas and ensures a smooth transition between elected representatives. But for groups of people who constantly face structural oppression, the maintenance of a system that doesn't serve them is of little concern. Despite the pervasive narrative in the media, the lack of turnout isn't all about apathy. It may actually be an active expression of discontent with the status quo.

Those immigrant and Latinx voters in Georgia, along with all other infrequent or inactive voters, must be welcomed into the conversation before it's time to vote if we want them to show up. The critical act of voting must be combined with collective organizing efforts—in advance—if we want the elected to represent the entire population and not just a privileged fraction of it.

Under the Trump administration, on the other hand, fiscal hawks have become crickets. Rising debt has become insignificant as plans to build border walls and wage wars abroad have taken precedence. In both instances, organized and well-resourced groups have created political terms that have real policy impact. Nothing in politics is serendipitous.

These organizers contest the notion that all we need to do is maintain business as usual. Their efforts have also helped shape the candidate pool for this coming election. An unprecedented number of women and LGBTQ people, many of them



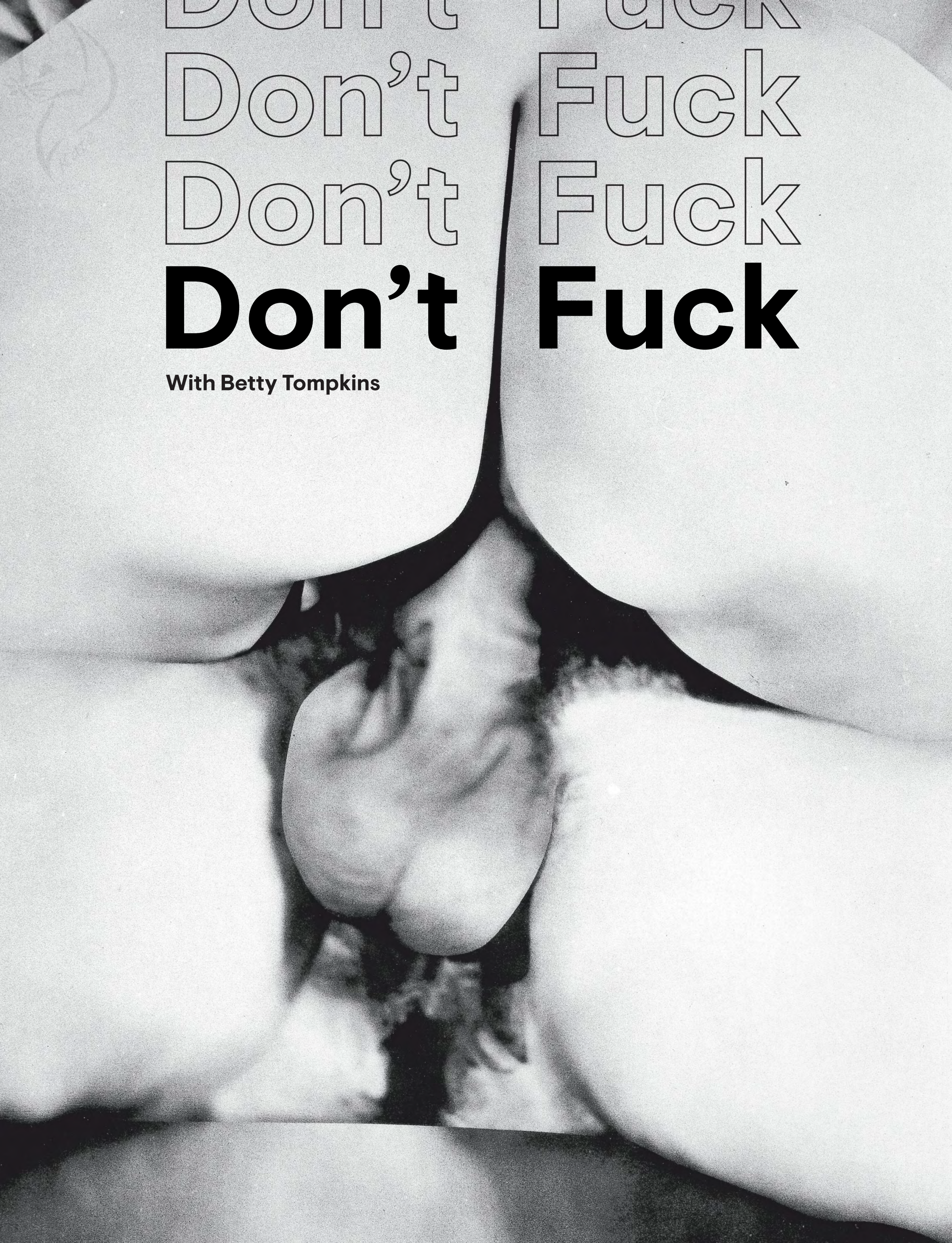
A record 32 million Latinxs are projected to be eligible to vote in this year's election, making them the largest racial and ethnic minority group in the electorate. An estimated 27 percent of those who cast ballots in the 2018 midterms were first-time midterm voters. Our power, as outsiders, is rising.

Through deep organizing we can motivate people to fight like hell for the solutions we seek to the challenges of our time. In doing so, we can make our government work for the many—like every democracy should—instead of for the few.

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With Betty Tompkins

Fuck
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"I was an accidental dissident."

Betty Tompkins is talking about her rocky beginnings in the New York art world of the early 1970s. Although she may not have set out to become a feminist renegade, her comment comes across as a surprising understatement, given that her entire practice has been a case study in the assertion of free speech—against the pieties of government watchdogs, art-world gatekeepers and factions within the feminist mainstream. And though Tompkins is a prolific artist who continues to push the boundaries of political correctness, her decision to appropriate hardcore pornography as her primary source material resulted in a revolutionary position on one of the most controversial aspects of First Amendment law.

From anti-porn feminists to the French government to Instagram, Tompkins has been fighting censorship—and paving the way to free sexual expression—for nearly 50 years

BY ALISON M. GINGERAS

In 1969 Tompkins embarked on a series of photorealist works she audaciously titled *Fuck Paintings*. Rendered in airbrush on monumental canvases, the paintings portray tightly cropped scenes of intercourse based on her first husband's collection of explicit photographs. Over five years, she made nine seven-foot-tall canvases that unapologetically depict penetration.

"The porn came with him," Tompkins says, reflecting on her ex-husband's contributions. "What I was doing, when I look back on it, was outrageous. A decade before we met, he would see ads for photos in the back

of girly magazines. They were about two by three inches." Because it was then illegal to send pornographic material through the U.S. Postal Service, her husband rented a mailbox in Vancouver, Canada and would drive there from Washington state to procure his clandestine stash. "He had to hide them in the cushions of his car crossing the border," Tompkins recalls. Although such images are no longer prohibited by law, Tompkins's compositions still manage to startle. Her *Fuck Paintings* are simultaneously abstract and figurative: She transformed the graphic punctum of pornographic penetration into portraits of sexual free speech.

Little could she anticipate how these paintings would become flashpoints in the feminist sex wars that would rage throughout the 1970s and 1980s and up to the present. The *Fuck Paintings* weren't specifically made to address shifting social attitudes toward sex, but the work was developing in tandem with major political and legal debates around the definition of obscenity. After numerous court rulings led to the progressive relaxation of strictures on sexual speech in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the so-called golden age of porn bloomed—a period often cited as beginning with the 1969 release of Andy Warhol's *Blue Movie* and continuing with the widespread distribution of X-rated films such as *Deep Throat*. Pornography polarized the women's movement: Feminist discussions about women's sexual

agency, as well as polemics around porn's supposedly inherent misogyny, divided women into opposing factions.

Tompkins hadn't set out to take sides with her *Fuck Paintings*. "At that time," she recalls, "I was totally unaware of all the prejudices in the art world toward the young and toward women." The catalyst for her subject matter was her boredom with the art that New York galleries were championing, later fueled by her disgust with the blanket rejections she received from those same galleries when she spoke to them about exhibiting her work. "Nobody even said maybe; it was no! Even the women dealers refused me," she says, the emotion in her voice rising as she reminisces. "When I questioned them, they all said, 'We don't show artists your age.' Then they would say, 'Don't come back at all; we don't show women.' It was shocking, and it was also totally liberating." With nothing left to lose, Tompkins sat in her small bedroom studio and plotted her next move.

Fuck Painting #1 (1969) took shape as she rummaged through her husband's photography collection. "I started cropping with my fingers, then ripped up pieces of paper to find exactly what I wanted." She removed the models' faces, hands and feet, a gesture that sparked her radical breakthrough in a humble space "about five feet wide between my bed and the wall." Using an airbrush loaded with white and black acrylic to achieve a hyperreal effect, she created her first *Fuck Painting*: a seven-foot-tall vertical canvas depicting vaginal coitus with the female on top—a fitting position for Tompkins's prefiguration of sex-positive feminism. The anonymous woman's ass, offset by dark shadows and some wisps of her partner's pubic hair, dominates the composition; the man's spread thighs, scrotum and part of his erect penis take up the bottom half of the canvas. Removing all traces of the couple's identity,

“What I saw was hundreds of years of **misogyny** in the art world coming up to my **face** and giving itself to me as a **present.**”

rendering their flesh in gradations of gray, Tompkins bypassed the soft-core tropes of commercial erotica to focus on point-blank phallic penetration. Unfettered by a need to please, she began to explore the provocative iconography that became her signature preoccupation—as yet unaware of how divisive her subject matter would become.

Before Tompkins could even begin to establish herself, censorship waylaid her career. “When I moved to SoHo I was invited to be in a show called A Flash of U.S. Avant Garde: Realism, New Realism, Photo Realism, at the Espace Cardin in Paris. At that point I had been in two group shows in New York City, one at Warren Benedek Gallery and the other at Lo Giudice Gallery,” Tompkins told me during a panel discussion at the Dallas Contemporary museum in 2016. She shipped *Fuck Painting #1* and *Fuck Painting #5* (1972) to Europe, only to have them impounded at the French border on the grounds that they violated obscenity laws. Instead of basking in what should have been her breakout moment, Tompkins belatedly learned of the seizure. “I received a letter from the curator of the show saying my work had been stopped in customs,” she said in 2016. “I was really upset. I felt totally blindsided by the event.” For about a year Tompkins waged a bureaucratic battle to get her paintings returned to New York. “It felt like a decade in the analog age,” she says.

Although the whole French affair was debilitating, Tompkins didn’t take it passively. She leveraged and transformed the negativity, embarking on her *Censored Grid* series in 1974. In these drawings, Tompkins revisits the same pornographic motifs as in her previous series, this time meticulously rendered in pencil, pen and ink, often with the “offending” parts obscured by the word *censored* drawn, written or stamped over the graphic imagery.

“It was a way to keep sane,” she explains. “I was not up on any art history that had to do with censorship, except maybe Courbet’s painting.” (Indeed, the *Fuck Paintings* are heirs to *The Origin of the World*, the infamous 19th century oil painting

of female genitalia—the ur-work of sexually explicit art in the Western canon.) “Basically what I said was, ‘Oh you think you can censor me? I can do a better job.’ I thought if I censored myself it would have more legitimacy.”

Initially deployed out of frustration, text became a staple of Tompkins’s conceptual tool kit. She would foreground language in much of her later work as a way of reclaiming vile, misogynistic or demeaning terms—most recently in her *Women Words* series, begun in 2013. In the same manner that she had appropriated pre-existing photography for her *Fuck Paintings*, Tompkins culled her texts from an archive of more than 3,500 terms for women she had solicited via e-mail. “What was really important with the thousand ‘women words’ on canvas was that none of them could be from me,” she says. “The rule I made was it all had to be given to me.” Painted on backgrounds that range from monochromatic to lace overlays or close-ups of the female body, epithets such as *bitch*, *slut* and *cunt* dominate this anthology of small canvases, as do clichés like *ball and chain* and the imagistic *I’m going to Jackson Pollock all over her face*. As the series evolved, Tompkins began to transpose the words onto the female subjects within iconic works by male photographers including Helmut Newton and Richard Avedon.

But Tompkins could not direct her defiance at adversaries she didn’t realize she had.

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Around the time her work was facing governmental erasure in Europe, Tompkins was subjected to an even more powerful form of exclusion by women artists in her own backyard. Emboldened by the momentum of the women’s liberation movement, feminist artists groups had mushroomed in New York City. In Tompkins’s SoHo neighborhood, women-run collectives such as AIR Gallery (which is also artist-run) were founded in the early 1970s to provide a platform for women who’d been systematically excluded from the commercial art world—some of them, anyway.

“I saw every show they put up at AIR, but my impression was that you were invited to show. It was like a club,” Tompkins says, remembering the cold shoulder she received from her feminist neighbors.

Unbeknownst to Tompkins, another coterie of feminist artists had banded together in solidarity over their right to make explicit erotic art. The Fight



Opening page: *Fuck Painting #1*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60 inches. **Left:** *Collage #6*, 1973, mixed media, 5 x 4 inches. **Below left:** *Collage #12*, 1977, mixed media, 11 x 8 inches. **Below right:** *Cow Cunt #2*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60 inches.





Right: *I'm going to...*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 24 inches. **Below left:** *Babydoll #2*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 4 x 6 inches. **Below right:** *Women Words*, installation view at PPOW Gallery, New York, 2019 (originally exhibited at the FLAG Art Foundation).



Censorship Group, founded in 1973 by artist Anita Steckel, could have been a game-changing outlet for Tompkins. Its manifesto seemed tailor-made for her iconography and her own struggle against censors: “If the erect penis is not ‘wholesome’ enough to go into museums—it should not be considered ‘wholesome’ enough to go into women. And if the erect penis is ‘wholesome’ enough to go into women, then it is more than ‘wholesome’ enough to go into the greatest art museums.” Yet this bold vindication of phallic imagery would not be extended to Tompkins. While the group decried museums’ puritanical policies and asserted the right of women artists to reclaim this field of sexual representation for themselves, some members opposed commercially produced pornographic material, claiming it was a tool of patriarchal oppression.

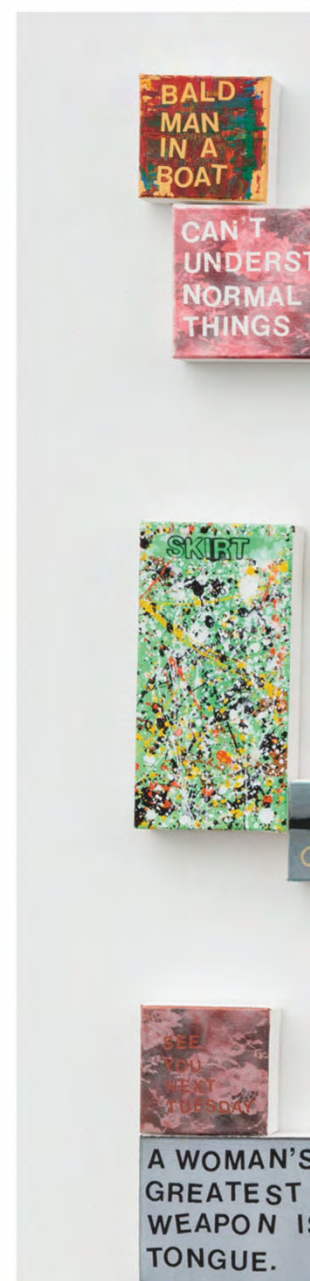
“I had used pornographic photographs that I hadn’t taken myself,” Tompkins says. “That was the main objection.”

In the mid-1970s, Tompkins literally rolled up her monumental *Fuck Paintings* and put them in storage in her loft. She made a living teaching for the next three decades. (A surreal side note: The gender-convention-pushing comedian Joan Rivers was a private oil-painting student of Tompkins in the early 2000s.) Teaching did not stop her from making art: She created a series of paintings on paper based on foundational legal texts such as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights—the word *law* appears in their backdrops, repeated in all caps like a protest chant. “I’d read an article that posited that students could not identify them on sight. That was shocking. So I painted them.” Reminiscent of fragmented illuminated manuscripts, these pieces play upon Tompkins’s struggle against repression—

which dates back to her earliest childhood memories.

Tompkins was born in Washington, D.C. in 1945 and raised in Philadelphia. Her father was head of the local chapter of the left-wing Progressive Party—a controversial association in an age of Cold War paranoia. “My first complete sentence,” she says, “was ‘Do you have a search warrant?’—when I was a toddler with a five-word vocabulary!” The FBI regularly followed Tompkins and her sister to school, during a time when the government was largely anti-liberal. It’s hard not to see these formative experiences as a source of Tompkins’s fortitude in asserting her rights as a citizen, an artist and a woman. She has also cited the way she was raised as a reason for her disinterest in belonging to systems and groups as an adult.

Only at the turn of the 21st century was Tompkins given another opportunity to show in New York—this time on her own terms. In 2002, New York City public school teacher turned renowned gallerist Mitchell Algué finally had the guts to exhibit her full cycle of nine *Fuck Paintings*. “Jerry Saltz came into the gallery around 2000 or 2001 and handed me a sheet of



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York Times art critic Holland Cotter declared Tompkins's belated debut "formidable" in an article entitled "Two Nods to Feminism, Long Snubbed by Curators."

Artist Marilyn Minter still remembers the breakthrough show. “When I first saw her hardcore images at Mitchell Alkus, I couldn’t believe my eyes,” Minter says. “Honestly, my first thought was, Damn, I thought I was the first. But I also thought how much braver she was than me and how much shame must have been thrown at her back in the 1970s. Being officially censored by the government was truly scary stuff.”

Speaking of the art-world backlash both she and Tompkins experienced, Minter continues, “Most art people were so frightened about any women owning sexual agency. It was such a threat to the status quo back then and still today, unfortunately.” Adds Saltz, “The world still fears women picturing dicks and blow jobs.” Nevertheless, Tompkins’s 2002 outing brought in the first of many critical appraisals that would help reinsert her into art history and a larger feminist conversation.

By that time, feminist discourse had become less polarized and more diverse. The anti-pornography wing of American feminism, promulgated by theorist Andrea Dworkin and lawyer Catharine MacKinnon, had lost its stranglehold, allowing for a range of positions on sexual speech in the mainstream and giving credence to more sex-positive feminisms. Despite the high emotional toll, Tompkins's work prevailed as a commentary on and harbinger of the ferocious political tensions that surround issues of sexuality, sexual free speech and sex work today.

Given this second chance to build her profile, Tompkins wasted no time. After her debut show with Albus, she began a





slow but steady climb out of obscurity. As her extraordinary story spread and revisionist art histories began to incorporate her work into the narrative of 20th century art, invitations to show in galleries, museums and biennials arrived in Tompkins's in-box from around the world. *Fuck Painting #1* was acquired by the National Museum of Modern Art at Paris's Centre Pompidou—a glorious outcome for a work that spent 30 years rolled up under the artist's pool table. With this new approbation, Tompkins not only returned to making *Fuck Paintings*, she jubilantly expanded the range of her work, no longer limited to her original trove of miniature porno photos. With the savvy of a millennial, she mined the internet for material and advocated for her work on social media. Like a warrior who has awoken from forced hibernation, Tompkins engaged with new fronts on the battlefield for free speech and gender equity.

Since she joined Instagram in 2015, Tompkins's postings of her paintings have been regularly taken down—flagged as “inappropriate.” In the spring of 2019, her account was deactivated. After protesting with the help of fellow artists, she got it reinstated, and Instagram invited her to participate in a private roundtable on censorship with other artists and cultural figures.

“As it turned out, I couldn't be there,” she says. “So I asked if it would be okay to write something that could be read at the panel so it's on the record.” Tompkins spent two weeks wracking her brain. Instagram, after all, is not a public utility or a public space and therefore not required to uphold the rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

“I said to myself, You actually never read their community guidelines. So I read them, and I was simultaneously so fucking angry and laughing so hard that I threw out all my ideas and sat down and wrote a statement.” Tompkins learned that when it comes to nudity, Instagram's rules allow for certain images such as nursing babies and mastectomy scars. “And, I quote, ‘Nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is okay too.’” After reading that, she wrote a statement for the panel that simply said, “‘These are your community guidelines. Follow them. Do better.’ That was my whole statement.”

Still occasionally subjected to deleted posts and account shutdowns (which Instagram attributes to “mistakes” due to high user volume), she hasn't shied away from holding the platform to its terms of use or publicly calling out its hypocrisies.

Tompkins will not be silenced—and similar to her practice in the 1970s, she has immortalized posts deleted by Instagram as the basis of a new series of *Censored* paintings.

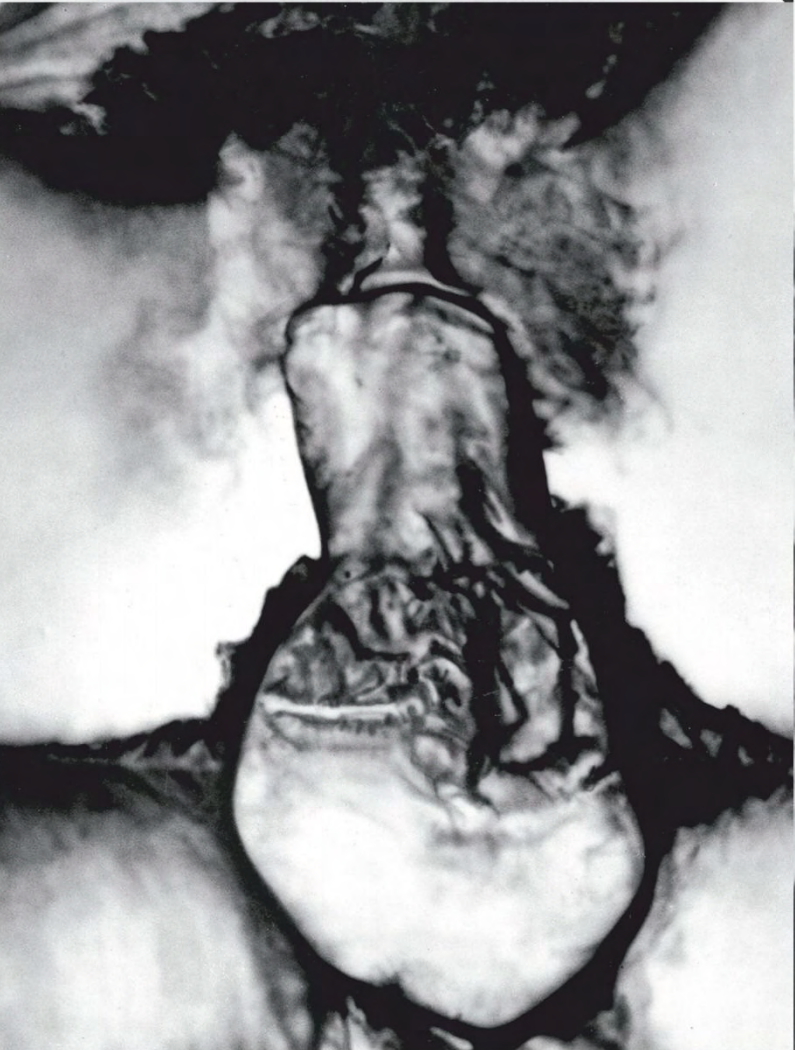
The same timely quest for justice drives Tompkins's most recent body of work. Under the umbrella title *Apologia*, Tompkins draws on public mea culpas from some of the most egregious sexual abusers toppled by the #MeToo movement, including press statements by notorious offenders Harvey Weinstein, Les Moonves, Mario Batali, Matt Lauer, Knight Landesman, Louis C.K. and Charlie Rose, among many others. Using her signature Bazooka-pink paint, Tompkins meticulously hand-paints the language geared toward covering up or redeeming bad behavior onto reproductions of famous paintings. In addition to highlighting the falsehoods and rhetorical backpedaling, she transforms familiar works by artists such as Ingres and Degas in the *Women Words* series by covering the female figures with the toxic language. Or as Tompkins explains, overlaying a woman in an art historical image with these scripts is like “putting her in a shroud: You're obliterating her, hiding her with words.”

In other *Apologia* pieces, Tompkins paints over the male figures in historical works by women artists—such as Artemisia Gentileschi's biblical scene *Jael and Sisera* (1620). Obscuring the supine figure of the general Sisera, who is about to be murdered by the woman Jael, Tompkins superimposes the words of artist Chuck Close, who has been accused of sexual misconduct by numerous young women: “It's lies. I haven't slept in weeks. I've been such a supporter of women and women artists. I've done nothing wrong and I'm being crucified.”

Tompkins's textual interventions confront the distortions of history while holding up a mirror to our present-day reckoning with systemic abuses of power. “One day I thought, Art history!” she says. “What I saw was hundreds and hundreds of years of misogyny in the art world coming right up to my face and giving itself to me as a present.”

It's tempting to interpret the *Apologia* series as an implicit rebuke to a college professor who, according to Tompkins, once told her, “The only way you're making it in New York, honey, is on your back.” And though decades separate her most recent word paintings and the pieces that scared off gallerists in the 1970s, they're united by Tompkins's will to transform or reclaim forces that seek to silence her. Her example has paved the way for a whole new generation of artists who continue the battle over sexual free speech, expanding on the feminist debates of the 1970s to explore and represent non-heteronormative erotic imaginaries. She may have started out as an accidental dissident, but Tompkins has grown to harness her monumentally defiant spirit.

Opposite: *Fuck Painting #1–9*, 1969–1974, acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60 inches.

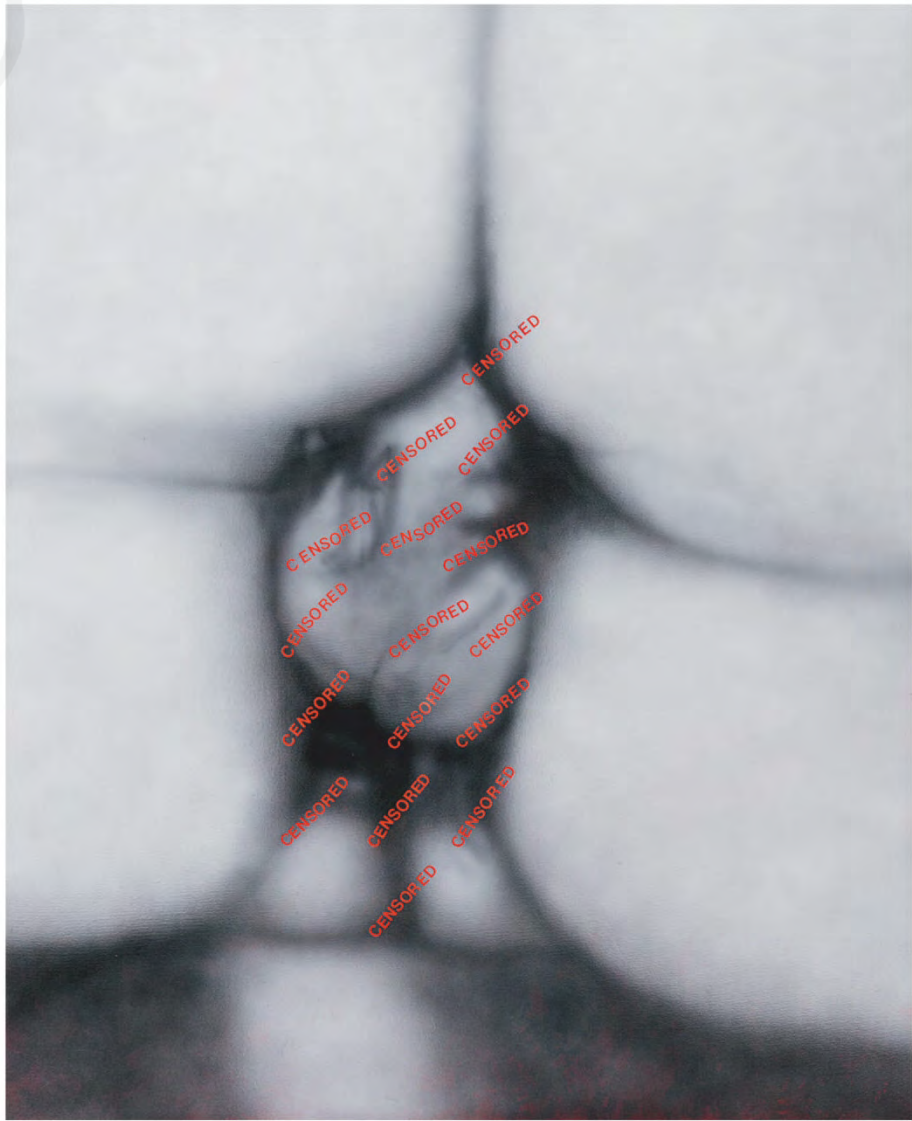




Voyeurism, American Playboy, Los Angeles 1989

women work (Helmut Newton #6)

Bethy Tonghies ©2018



Opposite: *Women Words* (Helmut Newton #6), 2018, acrylic on book page, 14 1/4 x 10 3/4 inches. **Above left:** *Censored Painting #2* (Paris 1973, Instagram 2019), 2019, acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60 inches. **Above right:** *Fuck Painting #46*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60 inches. **Right:** *Apologia* (Artemisia Gentileschi #3), 2018, acrylic on book page, 11 x 8 1/4 inches.





PLAYBOY'S party jokes

**This edition curated by
writer, producer, stand-up
comedian and pug
enthusiast Josh Gondelman**

WHEN someone tells you they believe in absolute freedom of speech, tell them their baby isn't that cute and see how they react.—*Josh Gondelman*

A new scientific study shows that 100 percent of the people who think Colin Kaepernick shouldn't protest during NFL games sent angry letters when *Last Man Standing* was canceled.—*J.G.*

PEOPLE say there's never been a better time to be a woman, but I think I would have had a lot of fun accusing my enemies of witchcraft.—*Kate Willett*

AFTER a well-lubricated first date and a night of intoxicated passion, a man and woman awaken in each other's arms.

"Want to go to Starbucks?" the man asks.

"No," comes the terse reply.

"Why not?"

"If I wanted to get called by the wrong name," the woman says, "I would just have sex with you again."—*Alison Leiby*

I'VE never experienced an earthquake, but I *have* rolled over onto my vibrator in my sleep.—*A.L.*

IF everyone gets mad when you "tell it like it is," maybe the way it *actually* is is "you're an asshole."—*J.G.*



ANOTHER couple is on a first date, but these two are struggling. After an agonizingly long lull, the man speaks up.

"You don't look like your picture on Tinder," he says.

Without hesitation the woman replies, "You don't look like someone who's remotely in the league of that picture, so I guess we're even."—*J.G.*

WHEN someone uses racial slurs and blames it on alcohol, as if it wasn't their brain that thought it and their mouth that said it, that's just unfair to alcohol.—*Jess Salomon*

I'M a firm believer in the right to free expression, except in the case of making any more movies that tell Spider-Man's origin story.—*J.G.*

AND if you want to stifle free speech, might I suggest getting me a puppy. I always shut the hell up when there's a puppy to play with.—*Lauren Vino*

GUY: It sucks that women aren't as horny as guys.

FRIEND: That's actually a myth. Women's sex drives are at least as high as men's.

GUY: Not the women I've been sleeping with!

FRIEND ...

GUY: Please never tell anyone about this conversation.—*J.G.*

PEOPLE say it's rude to talk politics at the dinner table, but if you ask me it's way *more* rude to eat a roast chicken at your polling place.—*J.G.*

AFTER 12 years of public education, I really thought I'd be expressing myself through diorama much more in my adult life.—*Hannah Boone*

PROPPED up in an Irish bar, a man leans over to the drinker beside him.

"Hey," he says. "Just so you know, I'm hung like a horse."

"Oh really?"

"Well, I frequently pee in the street during parades."—*J.G.*

THE way I most frequently exercise my male privilege is by constantly forgetting whether my pores are supposed to be big or small.—*J.G.*





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naked *defiance*

An artwork created from PLAYBOY's pages challenges the idea that nudes exist merely for others' pleasure

BY SARAH BOXER

Photomontages are subversive by nature. They're counterfactuals—pictures cut up and rearranged to show things as they are *not*, things as they *might be*, pictures that pose an anxious question beloved by fantasists, moralists and revolutionaries:

What if? Objects and bodies are turned on their heads, sometimes figuratively, sometimes literally. Think of the German dadaist Hannah Höch's 1929 photomontage *Fremde Schönheit* (Strange Beauty). Onto a photograph of a reclining nude white female body, Höch planted

an oversized image of a carved stone head, along with a pair of eyeglasses and eyes that are, in turn, too large for the head. The nude, familiar to Western eyes, thus has become a jarring hybrid. It's clearly subversive, but what exactly is subverted?

Keep this question in mind as we look at a photomontage with an unusual PLAYBOY history: the artwork displayed above. Created by Martha Rosler in the early 1970s, the piece is a subtle and comical work. Rosler, known for her socially biting photography, video and performance pieces, never titled this work, but it now goes by the laughably long name *Body Beautiful, or Beauty Knows No Pain: Hot House, or Harem (After Ingres)*. Snipped from the pages of PLAYBOY, these wholesome-looking young women lounge about together wearing nothing, forming a landscape of "alluring mounds of flesh," as Rosler has said. The women in this topography are white, mostly, and topless, all, coyly obscuring their privates in various ways, often while smiling and making eye contact.

These nudes were not always on the same page. They began their public lives separately, representatives in PLAYBOY magazines of



Above: *Hot House, or Harem (After Ingres)*, c. 1972, from the series *Body Beautiful, or Beauty Knows No Pain*, by Martha Rosler. **Right:** Rosler in *Letter K (Knife)* from her video *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, 1975.



a certain American ideal of beauty from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s—Connie Kreski, Kathy MacDonald, DeDe Lind and dozens of other models. Some years after publication, when the images had mostly finished out their lives in bathrooms, bedrooms and basements, they found themselves bound up with string and tossed into the garbage. And there they unwittingly began a new existence as part of the feminist revolution.

• • •

In the trash heaps of her New York City apartment building and the town dumps of southern California, Rosler found and rescued these photos from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. What she really dug about these sexpots was what she saw as their “just past” beauty, as she explains in an e-mail. She loved that they occupied “the twilight realm” between being desired and being rejected. By the time she discovered and recovered them, the nudes had been dumped for younger, more contemporary beauties as *PLAYBOY*’s primary aesthetic moved from “corn-fed” gals modestly revealing themselves to raunchier, more exposed poses. (The first Centerfold to go full frontal was in January 1972.)

Liberating the semi-nudes from their pages, Rosler rearranged them en masse on a new page for a new life. Like other Rosler photomontages of the early 1970s that juxtapose mismatched images to make a social point (in one work, for instance, a woman calmly vacuums her curtains while outside her window a scene from the Vietnam war unfolds), *Hot House* was clearly subversive. But to get back to our opening question, what does it subvert?

As I see it, in Rosler’s hands the *Hot House* panorama of bodies evokes not so much the cozy seductions of *PLAYBOY* itself but something vaguely threatening. As Richard Meyer, an art history professor at Stanford University, notes in “Feminist Art Re-Covered” (his chapter in 2019’s *A Companion to Feminist Art*), the *PLAYBOY* figures in Rosler’s collage “overproduce female submission to the point where it becomes something like its opposite—a wave of naked defiance”—and also, possibly a picture of female pleasure. That seems to be roughly how Rosler sees this work today too.

“Almost all the women in my photomontage are lying down,

in postures of allure or surrender,” Rosler says. But as part of a harem, she notes, “they arguably constitute a woman’s domain, a ‘heterotopia’ carved out at least temporarily from the domination of the master.” They’re rebellious servants, free and unafraid. Seen this way, the photomontage begins to look like a horizontal riff on Pablo Picasso’s famously challenging early cubist painting *Les Femmes d’Alger*, which features five female nudes aggressively standing and staring down the viewer. Even the colors are similar.

...

Throughout the 1970s Rosler kept *Hot House* in her home, only bringing it out as a slide for an occasional lecture. Two decades later, though, her collages began to enter the art market. As Meyer notes, copies of her pieces were no longer “rough-and-tumble paste-ups or agitprop flyers” but rather “editioned photographs (which is to say, commodities).” It was at this point that Rosler’s PLAYBOY photocollage acquired its long name.

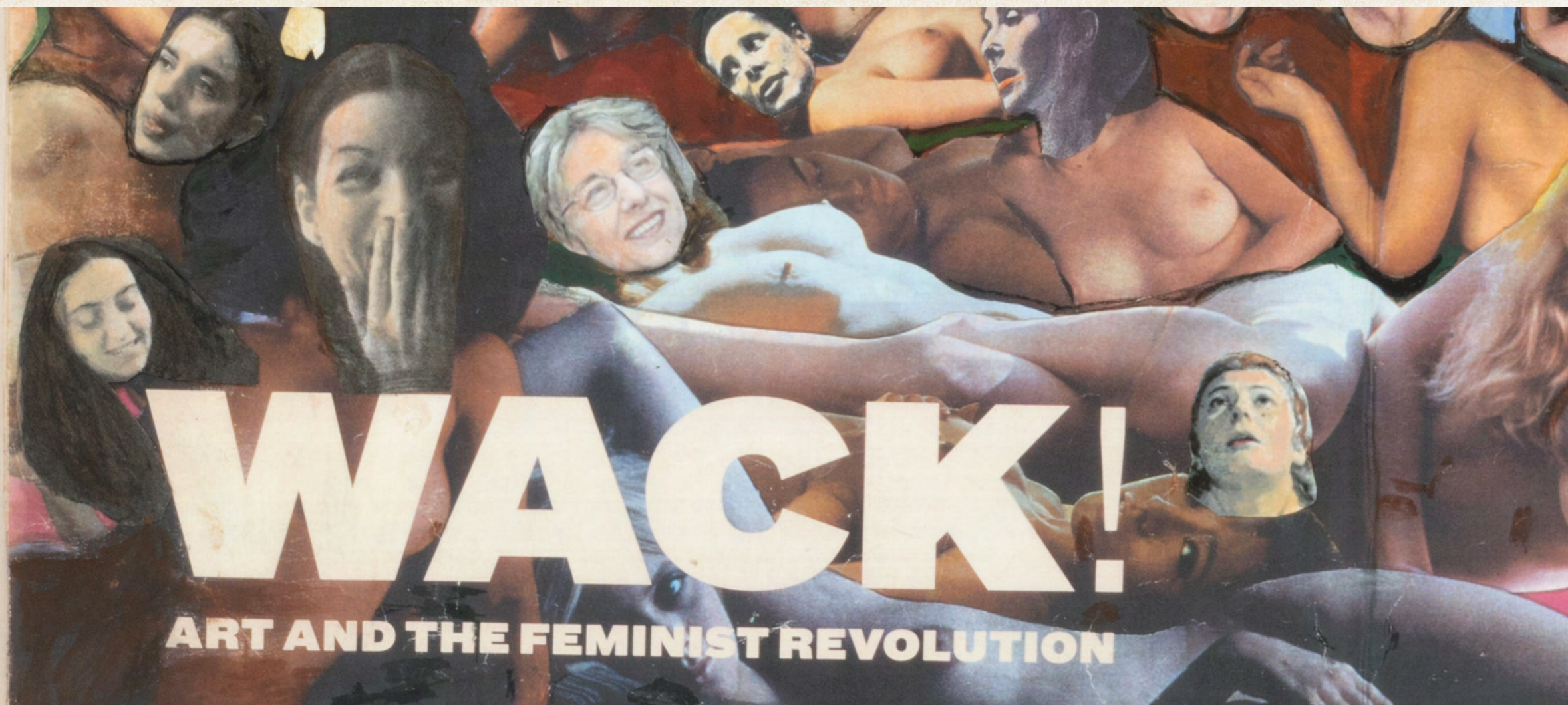
Then in 2007 the world was hit upside the head with WACK!, a groundbreaking

exhibition of 119 feminist artists. Organized by curator Cornelia Butler, the show opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and included plenty of provocative works, including *Hot House* and 30 other Rosler photomontages.

But the big news—and, for some, the big outrage—was the exhibition catalogue’s cover design, which features a large detail of Rosler’s collage and the words *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* splayed in white, all-caps letters across the mounds of flesh. The meaning of the *Hot House* nudes began to change anew.

Some artists were angry, some puzzled, some tickled. Some viewers worried that the cover seemed to sanction a particular kind of feminism: the branch that has become derogatorily known as “do-me” feminism. Others thought the cover suggested, inaccurately, that the WACK! exhibition focused only on women and their bodies, women as sexual objects and women as sexual beings. Still others complained about the cover’s “peep show” aspect. *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter called it “just another sex-sells pitch.” Never mind that Rosler’s work has always been considered revolutionary, sharply critical of the commodification of women’s bodies. Those same bodies—the nudes that had been made for PLAYBOY—had once again become hot commodities.

The reaction didn’t surprise Rosler. In fact, she remembers warning the catalogue’s designer that the cover would trigger a response. But Butler and the WACK! team stood firm behind their decision to feature the PLAYBOY nudes. (By the way, the Hugh M. Hefner Foundation happened to be one of several big



donors to the exhibit.) Rosler believes the curatorial team's insistence on using her PLAYBOY work was largely based on their conviction that a work of art "made up of a very large number of women, mostly looking at us without shame, is inherently ambiguous. It's 'playful!' and perhaps pleasurable—for women." In other words, there's safety in ambiguity. Well, maybe.

After WACK!'s L.A. opening, several of the exhibition artists went out for dinner, including Mary Beth Edelson, perhaps best known for her 1972 collage *Some Living American Women Artists*, which was included in WACK! In that collage, all the bodies at the table in Da Vinci's *Last Supper* are topped with the heads of female artists (for instance, Georgia O'Keeffe's head appears on Jesus's body).

"We were all euphoric over the exhibition," said Edelson, recalling the night of the WACK! opening in a Clocktower interview with Butler. "Of course the big discussion was the cover.... I mean, some of the women were very polarized about it, just thought it was awful." Others, including Edelson herself, thought it was pretty gutsy. As the evening wore on, someone suggested that Edelson do to the WACK! cover what she'd done to *The Last Supper*: paste the faces of feminist artists onto the bodies.

"We just all shrieked with joy," Edelson said.

Then Edelson went to work, gluing cut-outs of dozens of feminist artists' faces atop the models' nude bodies. A prominent position was given to Rosler, whose head is planted on the body of September 1967 Playmate Angela Dorian, right above the catalogue's title.

...

What kind of subversion is Edelson's radical redo? Is it an act of outrage, sisterhood or something else? Butler, WACK!'s curator, tells me by e-mail that she views Edelson's take as "a love letter to the show and everyone involved." And, she adds, it's also very funny. But Meyer sees it as a more ambivalent gesture, suggesting that although Edelson's collage assembles "a community of feminist artists—and the humor and pleasure they shared," it also signals those artists' anger about "being erased from the cover in favor of eroticized bodies posed for male pleasure." Unlike Rosler's *Hot House*, he notes, Edelson used a "purposeful crudeness" in her cut-and-paste technique, which points to what he calls "the rather different crudeness of the [real] WACK! cover—namely the way in which it presses naked women's bodies into the service of marketing feminist art."

Rosler, for her part, says she finds Edelson's "appropriation of my appropriation...clever...and humorous." This further subversion of the PLAYBOY images, she says, "converts the unnamed young body models of the PLAYBOY endeavor into risky/frisky images of well-known older women artists...replacing their anonymity with Personalities."

But wait a second—didn't these models already have personalities? Aren't they still personalities? Is it possible that Edelson, in obscuring their faces, has actually robbed the original models of something they'd managed to hold on to until that point—their very identities?

And now, with this article, the narrative of the nudes evolves once again: They have returned to PLAYBOY, from whence they began. Is this yet another radical gesture, and if so, what is its meaning? Well, it just isn't clear. And that's how it has always been. Even now, Rosler says she isn't sure exactly what she had in mind some 48 years ago when she assembled her PLAYBOY nudes. The cutting and positioning of the figures she recalls clearly, but, she says, "I simply have no idea when I thought of doing this photomontage, how long it took me to do it, or why."

So we're back where we started, with the same uneasy question: Why this subversion? What do we gain that wasn't there before in the PLAYBOY nudes? There's no obvious answer, but what jumps out is that after nearly 50 years, after all the cutting and pasting, effacement and rearrangement, one thing remains in its startling quiddity: the bodies themselves, just as fresh, or rather just as "just past" fresh, as they ever were.



Opposite: Detail from Mary Beth Edelson, *Best in Show* (WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution), 2008, ink and collage on book cover on paper. **Above:** Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

HERITAGE SPOTLIGHT

Meet *Naughty*
Granny's Dad



Cartoonist Buck Brown took the taboo and made it funny

BY EILEEN GUO

Many PLAYBOY readers know Granny, the unabashedly sexual saggy-breasted cartoon character who relentlessly attempts to seduce men, but far fewer are familiar with the artist who invented her for PLAYBOY's pages: Robert "Buck" Brown. It's past time to correct that.

Like Granny herself, Brown was, in his own telling, an unlikely candidate for the aspirational world of PLAYBOY. Born in 1936 outside Morrison, Tennessee, Brown moved to Chicago as a toddler with his mother and brother, part of the Great Migration of African American families

out of the South. His mother worked during the day and, lacking childcare options, sent Brown to accompany his older brothers to school. He was three or four years old when, amazed, he watched a teacher draw a truck on the blackboard.

"To me, he was *making* a truck," Brown (pictured at left) recalled in a 2007 HistoryMakers interview with Larry Crowe. "I wanted to do that too."

After finishing high school and supporting himself with odd jobs, Brown joined the Air Force at the age of 19. Serving for nearly four years, he drew satirical sketches of his unit in his free time; the positive reception helped him "learn the power of the pen." When he received his discharge papers, he returned to Illinois and found work as a bus driver for the Chicago Transit Authority in the late 1950s.

It was along his route that he found the initial inspiration for his Granny character. "A bus is, you'll pardon the pun, the perfect vehicle for a cartoonist," Brown said in a 1981 Playboy collection devoted to his work. "I used to keep a sketchbook and cartoon the situations that would happen on the bus. That's how I learned the art of storytelling." Slice-of-life moments included several in which older women boarded his bus asking innuendo-laden questions such as "Do you go down?" or "Do you go all the way?"

Hoping to get a foothold in the cartooning world, in 1961 Brown sent his first batch of sketches to PLAYBOY, expecting rejection; he had already been turned down by *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. "I wanted to be a cartoonist, but I knew deep down inside I couldn't, so I figured, if I was going to get my stuff rejected, why not get rejected by the best?"

Of the eight options Brown mailed, Hugh Hefner—himself an aspiring cartoonist, albeit in the years before PLAYBOY—accepted the eighth, a black-and-white drawing of a boy playing trumpet in the corner, his back to the room; his mother explains to his father, "No, he hasn't been naughty, he's just imitating Miles Davis." The reference to the musician's famous habit of facing away from the audience likely appealed to Hefner, a jazz devotee who would soon print the very first *Playboy Interview*—with Davis as the subject. The cartoon ran in a November 1961 issue of *Show Business Illustrated*, a short-lived title from Hefner's HMH Publishing Co., and Brown's relationship with the Rabbit was off and running: Across 45 years, Brown contributed nearly 600 cartoons to PLAYBOY. During his seven years as a bus driver, he was also earning an art degree. "Whenever I needed money, I would sell cartoons at PLAYBOY," Brown told HistoryMakers. "I cartooned my way through college." In 1965 he quit his CTA job to focus on art full-time.

By the time his naughty granny made her PLAYBOY debut, in 1966, women baring their breasts had long since been the magazine's norm. And yet the appearance of the toothless old woman with the voracious sex drive is noteworthy. This was no young beauty photographed in soft light and airbrushed to perfection; Granny's conventional unattractiveness, and sexual energy in spite of it, was the point.

"A young woman's sexuality is difficult enough to handle," wrote anthropologist Judith Posner in her 1975 paper "Dirty Old Women: Buck Brown's Cartoons." "Perhaps a sexy old woman is so horrendous that it is even difficult to joke about. But finally, somebody has, and [Brown's] humor may well be viewed as an attempt to disparage and push away the fear."

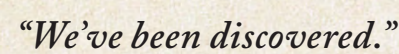
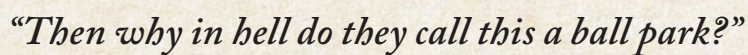
Upending norms and detoxifying off-limit topics turned out to be one of Brown's specialties. Key to this was his deft touch. His jokes weren't always obvious, observed comics critic and historian R.C. Harvey. "Brown's cartoons were often like that: You had to think before you reaped your reward in laughter."

The Granny cartoons are Brown's most popular, but perhaps more incisive are his works that comment on politics and race. Michelle Urry, PLAYBOY's longtime cartoon editor (and Brown's commissioning editor), described his takes on the civil rights and protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s as "gentle but sophisticated." Take, for example, his October 1967 cartoon that addresses the segregated housing then common across the country. In it, a group of black adults face a line of white ones on a suburban street; rather than protesting the new arrivals to the neighborhood, the white people smile and hold signs of welcome. Expressions of confusion appear on the black neighbors' faces. The caption reads, "It must be a trap!"

In a 1984 interview with Brown that touched on that cartoon,

Urry co
social j
simply

As for Granny, she became a PLAYBOY Centerfold in a 1980 humor piece. She continues to be beloved—and to tirelessly chase after sexual satisfaction. 

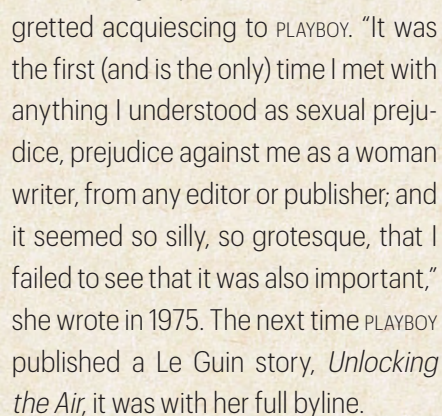


Rabbit-hop through time as we recall important anti-censorship moments from the magazine's first four decades, from battling the top postman to interviewing an outlaw—plus one regrettable hiccup

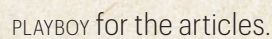
Rabbit-hop through time as we recall important anti-censorship moments from the magazine's first four decades, from battling the top postman to interviewing an outlaw—plus one regrettable hiccup

When PLAYBOY accepted the short story *Nine Lives* for publication, editors didn't realize the author, U.K. Le Guin, was Ursula. After learning the truth, they still wanted the story (about clones in space) for the November 1969 issue but asked permission to keep the byline as it was, apparently afraid of alienating their male audience. Le Guin (pictured below) agreed and supplied a short bio for *Playbill* hinting at a secret behind the author's identity: "It is commonly suspected that the writings of U.K. Le Guin are not actually written by U.K. Le Guin but by another person of the same name." Sci-fi readers would get the joke: Her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, published under her full name, had made a huge splash. Later, Le Guin re-

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Since 1931 the Library of Congress has published Braille versions of magazines. In 1970 PLAYBOY joined their ranks—"our gift to the government and the blind community," editors said. But in July 1985, Republican representative Chalmers Wylie of Ohio successfully led a vote to cut off funding for the Braille PLAYBOY; it had too much talk of "wanton and illicit sex," he complained. Outraged, blind readers, the Blinded Veterans Association, Playboy, the American Library Association and others joined forces to fight the bill and overturn what they saw as censorious and paternalistic censorship that violated First Amendment rights. In August 1986 the courts agreed, declaring the law unconstitutional and restoring blind subscribers access to PLAYBOY for the articles.



Not even a year into its existence, **PLAYBOY** faced its first major battle against censorship. After applying for a second-class mailing permit in 1954 and being denied, initially on technical grounds and then because Postmaster General Arthur Summerfield deemed the magazine obscene, Hugh Hefner took the Post Office to court. Hefner's 1955 victory was resounding, but until the end of his term as postmaster, in 1961, Summerfield waged a broader war to keep "obscurity"—his version of it, anyway—out of American mailboxes. In 1958 the Post Office tried once again to stop distribution of **PLAYBOY** (the November issue at left) on vague grounds of obscenity. Like Summerfield's other pet postal project, delivering the mail by missile, the effort failed, landing with a thud.

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By the time Abbie Hoffman sat for the May 1976 *Playboy* Interview, he was one of America's most prominent social activists. He was also a fugitive: The Yippie co-founder, Chicago Seven defendant and author of *Steal This Book* had jumped bail in 1974 after being arrested and jailed for dealing cocaine. On the run, he'd taken extreme steps to hide his identity, moving frequently and undergoing plastic surgery, and was looking for a platform to share his ideas. "PLAYBOY is, in effect, saying to me, 'Come out and date with the government in the open, and I will protect you and cage me,'" he said. "I was on the line, no doubt about it. The piece came out, Hoffman said, and he told New York journalists that the magazine was "on the cover." "Did Hefner's henchmen find me from the Yippie desperado?" Hoffman asked *Voice* on May 3, 1976. The magazine said Hoffman lived "underground" in New York City in 1980 before turning himself in to prison, eventually serving about one year.

[illegible]

Louann Fernald





I was born in San Antonio, Texas and raised in Cocoa Beach, Florida, where I had an idyllic upbringing. My mother retired early from nursing to be a full-time mom, and my father was a rocket scientist. I mean literally—he was in charge of testing guided systems for missiles at Cape Kennedy. I was really nerdy growing up: I was a Girl Scout, I was shy, I wore glasses from the age of seven. My parents, who always encouraged me to rise above expectations, gave me sports equipment, musical instruments and books instead of dolls.

**The environmentalist
and Twitter enthusiast
weighs in on activism,
her career as an
attorney and how
becoming the June
1979 Playmate opened
up her world**

I loved being active and learning, but as I grew up I chafed against my parents' rules. I began to rebel when I was 16, buying contact lenses and a string bikini. Still, when I turned 17 and went off to the University of Florida, I chose pre-med as my major to impress my father. But my grades started to sink, so I switched to journalism and public relations. Away from my parents, I felt I could finally live my life on my terms. I moved in with my boyfriend's family and began waitressing my way through college.

The tips were terrible and the hours long, so when Playboy came to Gainesville for the 25th Anniversary Great Playmate Hunt, I was curious. I went to the audition, a photographer took a couple of Polaroids of me in my bathing suit by the swimming pool, and that was it. Three weeks later Playboy called and offered to fly me to Chicago for a photo shoot. I thought, Why not? Next thing I knew, I was the June 1979 Playmate of the Month.

I used the money I earned from Playboy to pay for the rest of college and then moved to Los Angeles on a whim. Dorothy Stratten, the August 1979 Playmate, was the first person I met in L.A. We became close and spent almost all our time together. She got me into acting and helped me get auditions. We even traveled and spent the holidays together.

When Dorothy was killed, I was devastated.

I gave up on becoming an actress and went back to Florida to try to move on with my life, though I eventually moved back to L.A. and reconnected with other members of the Playboy family. Over the years I've been a stockbroker, a public relations executive, a business owner and an attorney. My association with Playboy followed me to every job: While some bosses looked out for me, others looked down on me just because I had posed nude. I always felt I had to prove myself more than anyone else because of it.

The most demanding role I've ever taken on? Being a mother. I have three children, twin sons and a daughter, all in their 20s now. Being a mom is hard work, and it became even more difficult when their father and I divorced and went through a messy custody battle.

The challenges of that period in my life influenced my career as a family court attorney. I was able to relate to my clients because of my personal experience, and I think my perspective enhanced my legal advice. I also worked as a criminal defense attorney, representing people who'd gotten in trouble for petty crimes. These so-called criminals were most often men of color in their late teens. A lot of these kids hadn't been given a fair chance. I wanted to be an advocate for

them and for other people who couldn't stand up for themselves. I found it tremendously rewarding.

After about 10 years as an attorney I got tired of fighting every day, so I considered the broader picture of how I could make a difference. As a Playmate I had a platform to spread a message that was important to me; in the article that accompanied my pictorial I appealed to readers to protect the environment. Growing up on the beach had shaped my love for nature, and I never let go of that connection.

In my 40s I lived near a dairy farm in upstate New York and became intimately familiar with the industry. Cows produce milk only after they give birth, so dairy farmers inseminate them every year, then sell the calves and start all over. It's cruel; as a mother I deeply objected to the practice. I stopped eating dairy, and after about a week I lost five pounds and felt physically better. I became a certified holistic health counselor in 2010 and began studying dietary theory. Today I maintain a predominantly plant-based diet. It's good for my health, kind to animals and great for the environment.

I turn to Twitter sometimes to speak out on topics I'm passionate about. I tend to take a progressive approach to politics, which isn't always well-received by my conservative followers. The 2016 election really drove me to take action and express myself.

I think it's essential for people to exercise their right to vote—it's how every citizen makes their voice heard. Voting strengthens our democracy and helps us grow as a society. We shouldn't be concerned only about what affects our lives here and now; we have to pull together to fight long-term challenges like climate change. I want to do what I can to leave the world at least as good a place as it was when I got here, if not better.

The biggest life lesson I've learned was from Dorothy: Don't be envious of anyone else, because you never know what's going on in their life. And always love yourself.



I speak out on topics
I'm **passionate** about.
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their right to vote.





Opposite: "I grew up in Cocoa Beach, where I was always running around in my string bikini," Fernald says. "So posing nude was really no big deal." **Above and right:** "This was in the Chicago suburbs. By the end of the day, that was one clean car."



Kate



Opposite: "Ken Marcus took this photo in Venice Beach, California for the Playboy calendar. Of all my PLAYBOY photos, I think his are some of the best." **Right:** "This photo was from my very first test shoot in Chicago. I'd come straight from the campus of the University of Florida in Gainesville." **Below:** An outtake from Fernald's June 1979 Playmate pictorial, Sun-Kissed Crusader.





Left and below: Outtakes from Fernald's Playmate shoot. She grew up near the water, and her connection to the environment remains strong. She has also gotten back into performing: "I'm studying improv at the Groundlings Theater. My background as a courtroom attorney helps me think on my feet when I'm onstage." **Opposite:** "I spent a week shooting my Centerfold pictorial in photographer Dwight Hooker's home. His wife was there, and I felt like part of the family. The hammock was in their backyard."

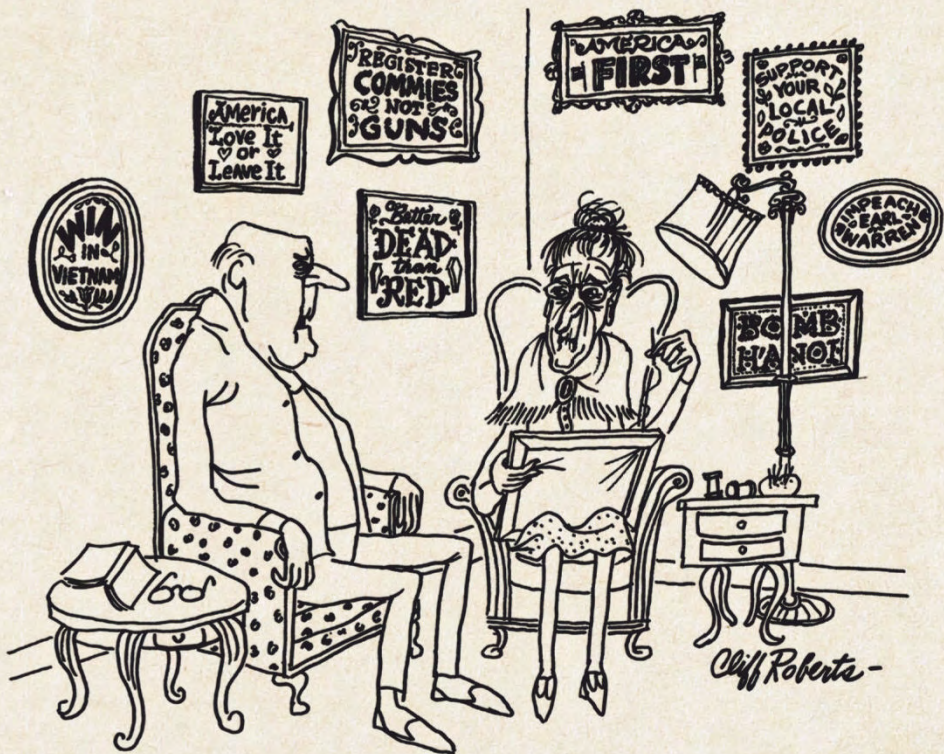




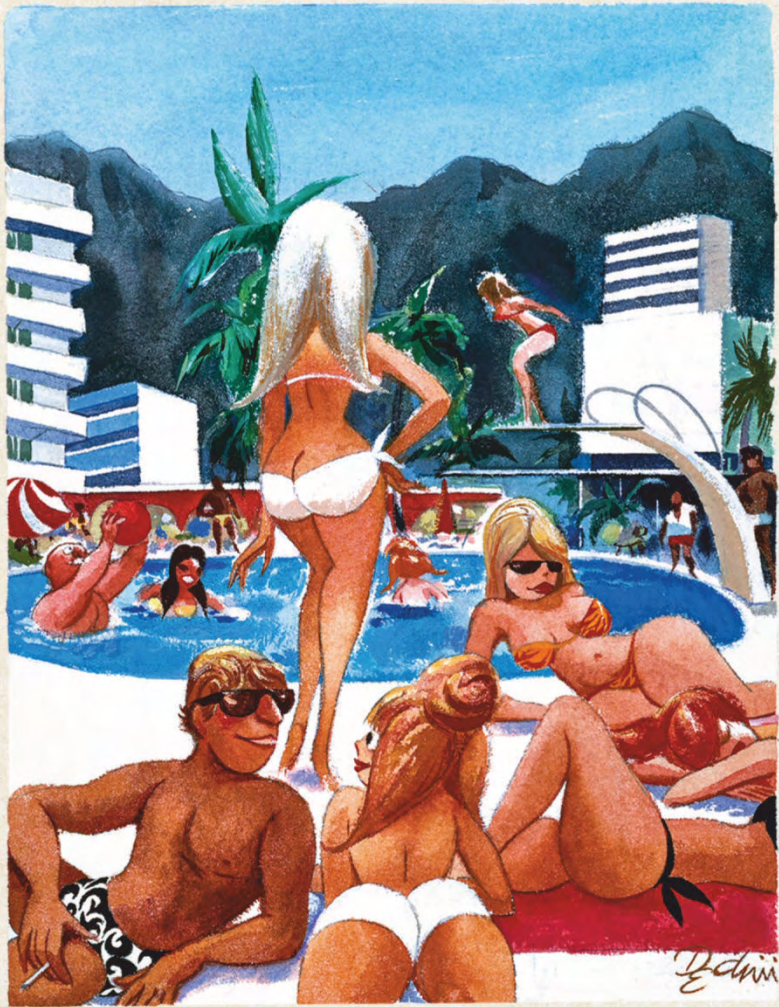
classic *cartoons*



"It turns out nobody has anything to say."



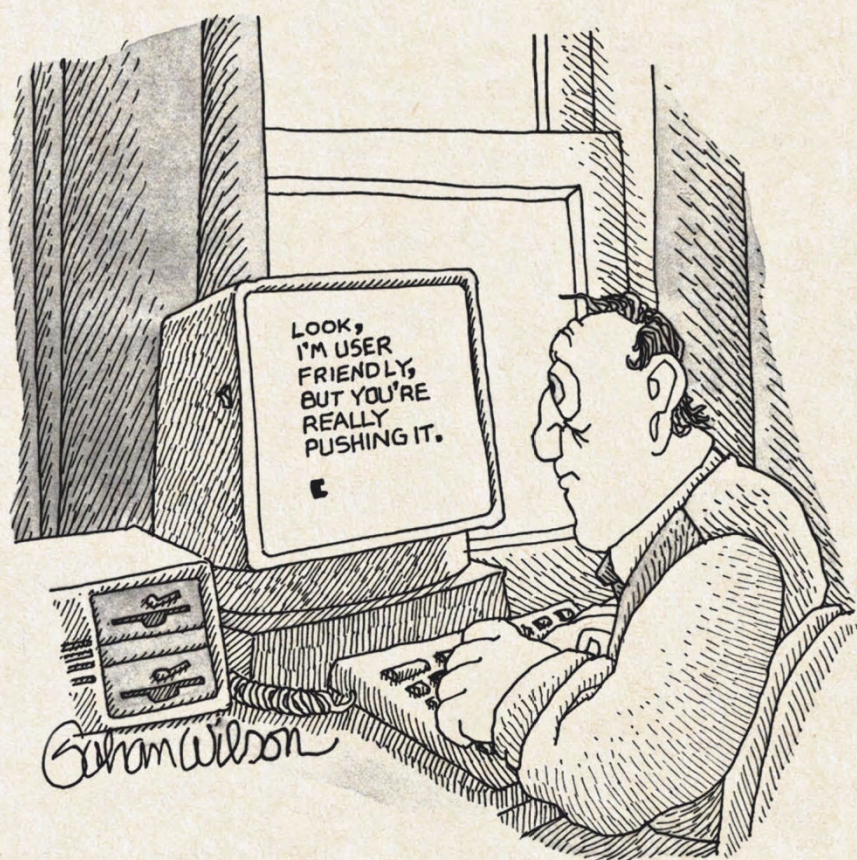
"How about a simple 'Home, Sweet Home'?"



"I feel that our fundamental democratic institutions and faith are on trial in the world today. That's why I'm here resting up for the supreme test."



"Bah—I just don't know what the youngsters are coming to these days."



"Well, I guess we know what his politics are."

on the record

Since its first installment in 1962, the *Playboy Interview* has featured well over 500 candid conversations with rebellious thinkers, cultural leaders and iconic newsmakers. Whether the subject is a politician or a puritan (or both, in the case of Jimmy Carter, who famously told *PLAYBOY*, “I’ve committed adultery in my heart many times,” right before winning the presidency in 1976), the interviews are always illuminating. From wise to wacky, here are eight memorable *Playboy Interview* comments. Can you match the quote with the person who said it? (For answers, see the far right of this page.)

1. “This ego stuff will kill you. It’s very isolating. Suddenly, the way you wipe your ass is news, big fucking news! People try to take your picture in the bathroom.”

2. “I almost wish I could not be me for a day, just so I could be entertained by the shit I say.”

3. “Everything in life to me is a psychological game, a series of challenges you either meet or don’t. I am always testing people who work for me.”

4. “There was a newspaper story about some fourth graders who were asked who they wanted as president. I came in second to Bush.”

5. “Adolf Hitler was one of the first rock stars. Look at some of his films and see how he moved. I think he was quite as good as Jagger.”

6. “I don’t do drugs; I don’t eat peanut-butter-and-bacon sandwiches; I don’t put foil on my windows and sleep for three days.”

7. “In my entire adult life I don’t think I’ve ever masturbated. I’m too embarrassed. If I have it’s been more than 10 years. First of all, I don’t have the fucking time. Second, it seems depressing.”

8. “We’re all into tight asses and tits that won’t hold a pencil under them.”

Read these *Playboy Interviews* and more on iPlayboy.com.



DAVID BOWIE



CHER



EDDIE MURPHY



KANYE WEST



DONALD TRUMP



WHOOPI GOLDBERG



CHELSEA HANDLER



CINDY CRAWFORD

ANSWERS: 1. Whoopi Goldberg, June 1987; 2. Kanye West, March 2006; 3. Donald Trump, March 1990; 4. Cindy Crawford, September 1995; 5. David Bowie, September 1976; 6. Eddie Murphy, February 1990; 7. Chelsea Handler, November/December 2017; 8. Cher, October 1975.



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JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK, JANUARY 1974

Freedom of religion is a First Amendment guarantee, and occult-curious PLAYBOY photographer Alexas Urba dove deep into an exploration of spirituality, rituals and sexuality in his 1974 pictorial *The Devil and the Flesh*. The models in this unpublished outtake appear to be one part Joshua tree, one part mandrake—and 100 percent committed to the shoot.





JAMEELA JAMIL ALICIA GARZA
QUINTA BRUNSON **KALI UCHIS**
ALI MITTON CHLOE CHIPPENDALE
KELLEY ASH **PATRICK STEWART**
DORIAN ELECTRA BETTY TOMPKINS
MANCY GANT **ELIZABETH WEINBERG**
NICK CAVE RYAN PFLUGER **KILEY REID**
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